

VOCABULARY LEARNING FOR READING COMPREHENSION

Vocabulary Learning as a Strategy to Improve Students' Reading Comprehension Skills

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Abstract

This qualitative action research study informs the contribution of the design and implementation of worksheets based on vocabulary learning strategies to improve reading comprehension in a group of seventh graders in a public school in Bogotá, Colombia. The current study is supported by three constructs: materials development, vocabulary learning strategies, and reading comprehension. To accomplish the proposed objectives, five worksheets were designed and implemented considering the principles of materials development. In addition, the data were gathered by means of students' artifacts, field notes, and focus group interviews. These instruments conducted the researcher both to collect evidence methodically and answer the research question.

The findings of this research study showed: firstly, that teacher-made materials triggered effective processes to improve the reading comprehension. Factors like building understanding and confidence, and the design of teaching resources focused on the development of the brain's potential contributed substantially to the improvement of students' reading comprehension. Secondly, it was evident the importance of considering L1 as a source to support vocabulary learning due to the fact that students relied on Spanish to figure out how the L2 worked; besides, their only previous linguistic knowledge is their mother tongue. Thirdly, it was revealed the impact that certain factors and strategies like sharing and comparing knowledge with peers had on the students' reading comprehension.

Keywords: materials development, worksheets, vocabulary learning strategies, reading comprehension

Resumen

Esta investigación cualitativa se basó en el diseño y la implementación de talleres a partir de estrategias para el aprendizaje de vocabulario con el fin de mejorar los procesos de comprensión de lectura en estudiantes de grado séptimo en un colegio público en Bogotá, Colombia. Este estudio se fundamenta en tres constructos: desarrollo de materiales, estrategias de aprendizaje de vocabulario y comprensión de lectura. Para alcanzar los objetivos propuestos se diseñaron e implementaron cinco talleres considerando los principios para el desarrollo de materiales. Se analizó la información obtenida de los siguientes instrumentos: trabajos de los estudiantes, diarios de campo, y entrevistas de grupos focales. Estos instrumentos direccionaron a la investigadora a recoger evidencias y a analizar la información para responder a la pregunta de investigación.

Los hallazgos de esta investigación muestran que: primero, los materiales elaborados por los maestros incentivan el desarrollo de procesos efectivos para la comprensión de lectura. Factores como la construcción de la comprensión y la confianza, y la importancia de diseñar recursos educativos centrados en el desarrollo del potencial mental, contribuyen sustancialmente en el mejoramiento de la comprensión de lectura. Segundo, se evidencia la importancia de considerar la lengua materna como un recurso que contribuye al aprendizaje de vocabulario debido a la fuerte dependencia que los estudiantes desarrollan en español para entender cómo funciona la lengua extranjera, y al hecho de que su único referente de conocimiento lingüístico previo sea su lengua materna. Tercero, se demuestra el impacto que ciertos factores y estrategias como el conocimiento frente al funcionamiento de la lengua extranjera y el comparar y compartir con sus pares tienen en la comprensión de lectura de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: desarrollo de materiales, talleres, estrategias de aprendizaje de vocabulario, comprensión de lectura.

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Description

This qualitative action research study informs the contribution of the design and implementation of worksheets based on vocabulary learning strategies to improve reading comprehension in a group of seventh graders in a public school in Bogotá, Colombia. The current study is supported by three constructs: materials development, vocabulary learning strategies, and reading comprehension. The data were gathered by means of students' artifacts, field notes, and focus group interviews. The scholars considered for the construct of materials development were Tomlinson (2000), Rico (2012), and Núñez and Téllez (2009). Concerning vocabulary Grabe and Stoller (1997), Jackson and Amvela (2007), Laufer (1997), Aebersold and Field (1998), Gairns and Redman (2001), Thornbury (2011) and Scarcella and Oxford (1992). Regarding reading comprehension Smith (2004), Brown (2001), Grellet (1981) and Maley and Prowse (1997). As a conclusion it was found that teacher-made materials based on vocabulary learning strategies triggered effective processes to improve the reading comprehension.

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Content

This document contains five chapters: The first one explores the research problem, research questions, objectives and setting. The second chapter presents the literature review on materials development, reading comprehension and vocabulary. The third one comprises the methodological and instructional design. The fourth chapter deals with the data analysis, and the research categories and subcategories. Finally, the fifth chapter embraces the findings, the conclusions and the pedagogical implications.

Methodology

The approach that best fits this study is the qualitative research. According to Flick (2009), qualitative research is considered as the main tool to study social relationships characterized for their pluralization. He used this term to refer to the variety of worlds in a group of human beings, which makes difficult to standardize behaviors, thoughts, customs and beliefs. For this study, I decided to use the action research which, according to Mills (as cited in Donato, 2003), is conducted by teacher- researchers whose actions are focused on gathering information about specific aspects related to the teaching and learning processes. The data gathering instruments selected for this study were: students' artifacts, field notes and focus group interviews. All of them were chosen in light of the research question, the population, and the existing resources in that context. The instructional design of this study explores the characteristics of the pedagogical intervention, its instructional objectives, and the reasons to consider this intervention an innovation. The main objective of this pedagogical intervention is to design and implement five worksheets focused on vocabulary learning strategies, to foster reading comprehension in seventh grade students.

Conclusions

The findings revealed that the materials implemented had a positive impact on the students not only in terms of reading comprehension and language learning, but also as valuable resources that increased the learners' confidence and developed their brains' potential. In this regard, Núñez and Téllez (2009) declared that materials development "should not turn into a meaningless task with the sole purpose of enjoying and keeping the students busy" (p. 173). Therefore, the resources implemented in class should not be confused on games to entertain students; on the contrary, they must include activities that foster the students' language learning and develop an emotional connection.

Summing up, this pedagogical intervention had a positive impact on the improvement of seventh graders' reading comprehension. It was demonstrated that contextualized materials give the teacher and the students the possibility to explore different practices, provides students with opportunities to share their knowledge, and promotes language learning. Additionally, students understood the importance of sharing their knowledge to improve their comprehension.

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Introduction

Reading comprehension has been considered lately as one of the biggest challenges Colombian English teachers have to face in their classes, particularly in the public context. Reading comprehension has turned into a concern due to the low levels students reach every year. According to the results obtained in the standardized national examinations, which are based on literal reading comprehension (MEN, 2017), just 1% of eleventh graders belonging to public schools obtained a pre-intermediate level corresponding to B1 (MEN, 2015). Most of the times, those results determine the academic and job opportunities students from public schools will have.

The research problem in this study emerged from analyzing the reading process of a group of students belonging to a beginners' class. Lack of language knowledge focused specifically on high frequency words and basic vocabulary was identified as the main obstacle for reading comprehension. Language knowledge is related to vocabulary knowledge and its use in real contexts; consequently, vocabulary learning strategies were considered in this study as the central guide to design materials for improving reading comprehension.

This document contains five chapters: The first one explores the research problem, research questions, objectives and setting. The second chapter presents the literature review on materials development, reading comprehension and vocabulary. The third one comprises the methodological and instructional design. The fourth chapter deals with the data analysis, and the research categories and subcategories. Finally, the fifth chapter embraces the findings, the conclusions and the pedagogical implications.

Chapter I

Research Problem

Statement of the Problem

This research study aimed at proposing strategies to improve the seventh graders' reading comprehension levels through vocabulary development. The main concern of this study emerged after analyzing the results of two instruments used to determine what skill the learners needed to enhance the most. Such instruments were the needs assessment and the observations made in class while the students answered their first term tests. In the needs assessment the students expressed that learning English was challenging for them due to the following reasons: there are too many difficult words, they lacked motivation, and they had difficulties in terms of comprehension. Additionally, they mentioned that they would like to work on different activities to learn vocabulary other than using the dictionary.

As previously mentioned, I also used class observation to identify the seventh graders' attitudes when taking their first term tests. It was noticed that most of the students were nervous about facing the written text and they did not know how to approach it. When trying to use their dictionaries, they did not find the definitions they wanted as they were looking up for the function of words such as "of", "the", "and", and "in". Moreover, when reading and trying to comprehend the main ideas of the text, they made translations into Spanish to understand whole sentences. Finally, they were stuck when facing expressions or word chunks because they were used to literal translations. After ten or fifteen minutes, the learners had neither passed the first paragraph nor understood the main ideas of the text.

To understand the hindrances stated above, it was necessary to consider some literature concerning reading comprehension. To begin with, Laufer (as cited in Coady & Huckin, 1997) established three lexical problems that hinder the students' reading comprehension: lacking

vocabulary, word misunderstanding and inability to guess words. The first problem is related to the learners' lexicon, which is the mental vocabulary a person has. When the students' vocabulary is limited, they are not able either to interpret or to guess the words. This problem was also explored by Alderson (as cited in Coady & Huckin, 1997) who affirmed that without a low vocabulary knowledge, what he called a threshold, comprehension was not possible. To this respect, Laufer (as cited in Coady & Huckin, 1997) sustained that with insufficient vocabulary even "reading strategies become ineffective" (p. 2). In light of this, it is paramount that teachers work on basic vocabulary before checking comprehension or teaching reading strategies.

Under these circumstances, it was evident that the group of seventh graders had the first lexical problem - insufficient vocabulary-, thereby causing the other two problems: word misinterpretation and inability to guess words. Besides, basic vocabulary entails high frequency words and content words that the students did not know. By the same token, the students' previous knowledge about word form and use of dictionaries was limited, that is why they could not use these tools properly.

Additional difficulties were identified when talking to students about their social origins and previous learning experiences. Some of them expressed they had come from places like Quibdó – Chocó, Tumaco – Nariño, and Vichada, which implied that their education system was different from the one implemented in Bogotá. Likewise, according to the MEN (2012), each school has the autonomy to determine the quantity of hours any subject is taught per week; thus, the subjects with the highest number of hours are chosen based on the institutional projects of each school.

It is also pertinent to mention that the schedule in public schools is short; that is why, they prioritize the obligatory subjects such as Math or Spanish, disregarding the relevance of teaching English as a foreign language. In fact, some schools prefer not to hire English teachers for

elementary schools given that children receive few English classes. It is only until 6th grade that students have a certified English teacher and this subject becomes obligatory. Finally, it is worth noticing that few institutional projects are focused on bilingualism, thereby reducing the importance given to teach and learn a foreign language.

Research Question

How do the design and implementation of worksheets based on vocabulary learning strategies contribute to seventh graders' reading comprehension at a public school?

Research Objectives

General objective: To analyze the development of reading comprehension in seventh graders through worksheets based on vocabulary learning strategies at a public school.

Specific objectives: (a) To assess the usefulness and appropriateness of worksheets based on vocabulary learning strategies; (b) to assess the impact of vocabulary learning strategies on the improvement of students' reading comprehension, and (c) to describe features of the students' reading comprehension level as they complete the worksheets.

Related Studies

In this section I present some research studies that are relevant to this inquiry as they were centered on the same constructs I intend to explore: materials development, vocabulary learning strategies, and reading comprehension. It is essential to clarify that any of the related studies presents a direct connection among all the three constructs; therefore, it might be affirmed that their correlation has not been deeply studied in secondary school, which makes this study innovative.

Regarding materials development based on vocabulary learning, Hoyos (2016) conducted an action research study that aimed at describing the role of materials based on vocabulary strategies to develop vocabulary acquisition. This study involved 27 eighth graders from a public

school in Bogotá. The researcher designed and implemented five innovative and appealing workshops based on vocabulary strategies like contextual redefinition and verbal visual word association. The instruments used for data collection were students' artifacts, field notes, and focus group interviews class observation, two surveys and the artifacts produced by the students. The findings showed that affectional factors had a significant impact on students' vocabulary acquisition and motivation. Moreover, it was confirmed that vocabulary acquisition might be enhanced through the implementation of vocabulary strategies. This study contributed to my research as it deals with the use of vocabulary strategies and the design of workshops as class materials.

In the same line of thought, Dimas (2011) explored the explicit vocabulary instruction in a L2 content-area course with a group of undergraduate teachers in Bogotá. This instruction was developed through class activities and the completion of vocabulary entries in a word study notebook. The data collection instruments included teacher's lesson plans, students' word study entries, and a final interview. The findings revealed that the word study notebook contributed to students' learning because they had to use the vocabulary studied in class to participate in conversations guided by the teacher, which allowed them to improve their performance in the class activities. This research is relevant to my study as it is focused on the need to teach vocabulary explicitly, as well as it highlights the pertinence of having a vocabulary record, in this case a word study notebook.

Concerning vocabulary learning and reading comprehension, Mikhailova (2008) conducted an action research study that explored the role of materials based on pre-reading strategies and vocabulary building to improve students' reading skills. This study took place at a public school in Bucaramanga, Colombia, with a group of 30 seventh graders. The instruments for data collection were class observation and surveys. Mikhailova designed worksheets that

comprised stages for implementing reading strategies so that students could enhance their vocabulary knowledge. It was concluded that materials focused on pre-reading strategies improved the learners' interest and motivation towards reading activities, as well as they played a vital role in the incrementation of the students' self-confidence when facing reading activities. All of this led the seventh graders to develop their reading skills and lexical competences. The convenience of this study lies on the kind of materials designed and the emphasis on developing vocabulary knowledge to improve students' reading skills.

By the same token, at the international level, Hasbún (2005) studied the influence of explicit vocabulary teaching on both the students' vocabulary acquisition and their attitude towards reading in an EFL class. This study involved the participation of 25 students in a college reading comprehension course in Costa Rica. The researcher designed a variety of vocabulary exercises by following the lexical approach. The instruments for data collection included statistical analyses that demonstrated that students acquired the vocabulary suggested thanks to the pedagogical intervention. In addition, the participants expressed that improving their vocabulary had made them better readers and, at the end of the course, both their reading comprehension and attitude towards reading improved. Despite this study was conducted with a population whose ages are different from the ones of the participants in this study, it was important to me because it entails the use of the lexical approach to strengthen reading comprehension.

In terms of reading comprehension and materials development, Neita (2015) developed an action research study that implied the implementation of vocabulary activities in a Moodle Platform to improve students' reading comprehension. This study was carried out at a public school in Sibaté, with 21 ninth graders. Neita provided students with worksheets and technological materials that informed them on strategies to enhance their vocabulary learning and

reading comprehension. The instruments used for data collection were field notes, surveys, and students' artifacts. The findings showed that students could concentrate on the content of the texts after working on useful and specific vocabulary. Likewise, the use of reading strategies in the worksheets gave students the possibility to guide themselves through a structured process of meaning making. As a result, the ninth graders got motivated to learn vocabulary and improve their reading comprehension. This research is relevant to the current study given that it highlights the importance of designing encouraging materials focused on vocabulary and reading strategies to help students better their reading skills.

In the same vein, Becerra (2013) conducted an action research study centered on the use of dictionary and prior knowledge to improve the ninth graders reading comprehension. This study took place at a public school in Bogotá, in which a bilingual piloting program was implemented. Becerra designed some reading comprehension worksheets and questionnaires for encouraging the learners to use the dictionary and their prior knowledge. Instruments for data collection included students' artifacts, field notes, and a questionnaire. The findings demonstrated that looking up words in the dictionary and activating the prior knowledge not only facilitates the the understanding of several texts, but also aids the students to answer comprehension questions. Hence, the learners could answer literal questions easily, as well as they were able to start working on questions that required making connections between pieces of information. This study contributed to my research because it enlightened me on the relevance of triggering the students' previous knowledge and using dictionaries to work on word meaning.

Having described the studies that are related to my enquiry in terms of materials development, vocabulary learning strategies, and reading comprehension, I will present the setting in which this study took place.

Setting

This research study was conducted at German Arciniegas IED, a public school located in Bogotá, Colombia. This institution has approximately 1200 students divided in two branches and shifts. The levels of schooling include primary, elementary, middle, and high school. The emphasis of the school is communication, arts and expression, which are considered essential characteristics of the future graduates. According to German Arciniegas IED (2017), the school's philosophy is centered on the fact that each human being can be perfect through education and social interaction. Similarly, its vision aims at the education of responsible, creative, and innovative individuals who are able to promote the development of their own community and abilities. As well as this, its mission lies on acting as a transformative agent in the students' familiar and social environments by strengthening their self-esteem, creativity, participation initiative and life project.

The English language syllabus at German Arciniegas School is grounded on the comprehension and production of meaning and sense. The contents are divided into three terms, each one focusing on one generative topic from which grammar aspects are derived. Moreover, each term includes comprehension goals and performance indicators according to what students are expected to learn. The main objective of the program is to reinforce the development of communicative skills and provide learners with different tools so that they are able to interact effectively in real contexts.

In regards to the knowledge that the participants of this study need to know at their level, the National Standards in Education for the development of English language (MEN, 2016) established that students in seventh grade are supposed to: (a) understand texts written in simple language, (b) identify general and specific information, (c) use the dictionary properly and identify the right meaning of the words based on the context, and (d) apply reading strategies.

After comparing these standards and the results obtained by the students in their end-of-term tests, it is evident that vocabulary learning and its impact on reading comprehension are the areas that require more attention in the EFL class; that is why, I decided to focus the current study on these aspects.

Rationale

After observing the classes and analyzing the students' performance in the end-of-term tests, it was identified that seventh graders lacked knowledge regarding vocabulary, which affected their reading comprehension. According to Naggy (1988), "vocabulary knowledge is fundamental to reading comprehension; one cannot understand a text without knowing what most of the words mean" (p. 1). Similarly, Verhoeven, Van Leeuwe and Vermeer (2011) ascertained that stimulating vocabulary might have a positive influence on students' future reading process because more reading implies more knowledge of the target language. Therefore, it was necessary to begin this pedagogical intervention with the consolidation of new vocabulary before starting the reading comprehension activities.

In short, this study intends to establish a reciprocal relation between vocabulary and reading as vocabulary allows comprehension, and in turn reading comprehension permits the inference of words in context. Correspondingly, the main objective of this study is to help seventh graders improve their reading comprehension through the implementation of worksheets based on vocabulary learning strategies closely related to the topics in the syllabus for the English class.

Additionally, this inquiry is expected to influence the context in which this study was carried out because the teaching practices at German Arciniegas School are focused on grammatical aspects and the development of language skills is not a priority. Besides, this

research may aid the students to improve their results in the national standardized tests since they are based on reading more than in any other skill.

In the same line of thought, this study may be an important contribution to the ELT community, not only in the field of materials development but also in terms of English language teaching and learning in real classrooms at public schools. It is also an invitation to my colleagues so that they continue looking for efficient and appropriate strategies to develop skills in students with similar social characteristics and give them opportunities to learn a foreign language in a better way. I encourage teachers to enrich their English teaching practices by considering the learners' needs and providing them with tools that incite them to read more and become aware of the importance of using vocabulary learning strategies.

Along similar lines, this study might contribute to the research line on Materials Development and Didactics ascribed to the research group Critical pedagogies and transformation given to the fact that the materials and the pedagogical intervention were designed on the basis of three principles proposed by Núñez, Téllez, and Castellanos (2013): First, justice, equity and inclusion as this study will benefit a group of students who have not had the same possibilities to learn due to the characteristics of the school, their social origins and the national policies. Second, autonomy and empowerment since the pedagogical intervention will teach students how to solve problems by themselves. Third, quality assurance and professional development, which will be reflected on my professional growth and learning, on the quality of the contextualized materials that I designed and implemented, and on the way my pedagogical practices will be improved after finishing this academic process.

After considering the principles established by this research group, it is also important to highlight the role of the teacher as a public intellectual, historical thinker and transformer. Teachers with these characteristics can design their own materials and methodologies, despite the

existing amounts of materials that some institutions promote. Teachers as public intellectuals are endowed with the power to empower others. That empowerment should be encouraged by analyzing the reality, and schools are the places where we as human beings can legitimate or define that view of reality (Giroux, 1988). It means that teachers make the decision of transmitting knowledge and imposing the dominant culture as it has been done traditionally or proposing critical views of reality to take actions to transform it.

In addition, teachers as historical thinkers have the mission of promoting changes in human life through the historical adjustment of their own pedagogies and methodologies. Giroux (2005) affirmed that “the notion of literacy needed to be grounded in an ethical and political project that dignified and extended the possibilities for human life and freedom” (p. 1). Historical thinkers consider education as a historical project, which aims at changing and shaping students’ experiences and providing them with possibilities to keep their freedom. Besides, Teachers contribute every day to students’ development not only by structuring their learning experience but also by providing valuable life experiences. Freire and Macedo (2005) proposed that literacy gives people the possibility to make decisions by themselves, contributing in the end to democracy. In this sense, when materials and methodologies are structured with transformative intentions, changes in literacy and society should be visible.

The following chapter embraces all the theory that explains and supports the three constructs underlying this study.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Bearing in mind that the objective of this research study is to analyze the development of reading comprehension in seventh graders through worksheets based on vocabulary learning strategies at a public school, the constructs that guide this inquiry are materials development (MD), vocabulary learning strategies, and reading comprehension. This chapter embraces the definitions and main characteristics of these constructs, as well as it explains how they are related to my study.

Materials development

This research study is focused on the design and implementation of worksheets; consequently, it was necessary to analyze some definitions of materials and materials development. To begin with, Tomlinson (2000) defined materials as “anything used to help to teach language learners” (p. xi). Thus, materials can be any resource that informs about the target language and allows the students to practice what they know. Similarly, Rico (2012) stated that besides being mediators to expose students to an L2, materials are bases that conduct learners to interact with the culture. In this sense, materials include all the printed, visual or audio resources that a teacher uses not only to favor the L2 learning, but also to expose students to its cultural background.

As this research study is based not only in the implementation of materials but also in their development, it is important to ponder certain aspects related to materials development. It is pertinent to consider its process and the scholars who have contributed to its growth as a field of study. First of all, Tomlinson (2000) described MD as the set of actions settled “by writers, teachers or learners to provide sources of language to promote language learning” (p. 2). In other words, all members from the language teaching community can be considered materials

developers because all of them are able to design or adapt materials that benefit the language learning. On the same spirit, Núñez and Téllez (2009) highlighted the significance of designing materials for teachers' development. They claimed that materials created by teachers are quite important as they are based on both their teaching experience and knowledge about the language learning and learners. In essence, materials development implies the teachers' reflection and daily practice.

As well as this, it is vital to consider the stages that should be followed when designing materials. For instance, MD involves actions such as analyzing, contextualizing, designing, evaluating, piloting, correcting, and implementing, among others. To this respect, Núñez and Téllez (2009) argued that material development is “a demanding task of constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing their daily pedagogic practice as a mean of facing decision making” (p. 173). In any case, teachers need to bear in mind the students' needs and interests to create suitable materials that contribute to language learning.

MD as a field of study. Materials development has recently been conceived as a field of study due to its specific literature, processes, and importance in contemporary education and teachers' development. In this regard, Núñez and Téllez (2015) sustained that “Language pedagogy and applied linguistics have recently recognized that MD is a field of study focused on the effect of materials on the teaching-learning process of a foreign language” (p. 57). This means that MD has had an increasing transcendence in the ELT community since it enhances the language learning and teaching processes.

By the same token, Tomlinson (2000) stressed the necessity to keep in mind this field of study so that teachers create qualified materials whose efficacy is constantly assessed. It is worth mentioning that materials should also be developed on the basis of the second language acquisition principles and the value of teachers' and students' beliefs. Finally, it is pertinent to

clarify that materials development is “both a field of study and a practical undertaking” (Tomlinson, 2011, p. 2). In this sense, MD as a field of study implies a committed reflection on social contexts, cultural trends, teaching and learning needs and expectations, as well as it requires that teachers keep up to date in terms of research studies in second language acquisition and the challenges they must face today’s globalized world.

Requirements demands and components of MD. As previously stated, MD implies that teachers and materials developers ponder certain aspects when designing materials. With respect to the MD requirements, Núñez (2010) argued that it is paramount to keep the equilibrium among language learning, affective requirements, students’ interests and hopes, and school guidelines. In the same line of thought, Tomlinson (2010) suggested that materials development must accomplish at least the following requirements: expose students to a reliable language use, develop authentic input, provide students with chances to practice and produce language, give students advice, maintain students’ interest and awareness in learning, and finally, stimulate intellectual, artistic, and emotional participation. In light of this, materials development should respond to a set of intrapersonal, professional, contextual, methodological and institutional needs to fulfill the language learning expectations.

In regard to the MD demands, one of the most important concerns is that materials are developed by teachers. Kessler and Plakans (2001) sustained that the real experts in both teaching and materials design are teachers. They rejected the idea of having instructors developing materials and encouraged real teachers to implement systematic processes to create and evaluate their own resources given that they are the ones who know the students’ features. To this respect, Núñez, Téllez and Castellanos (2013) argued that MD “demands an informed methodology that allows validating the efficiency, appropriateness and relevance of materials within the context of learning a language” (p. 10). Certainly, teachers are the individuals who have direct contact with

the learners in the EFL classroom; hence they know what resources might meet the students' necessities.

In the same vein, materials must be inclusive in terms of the language features they embrace. Xiaotang (2004) suggested that materials need to include all the four skills, grammar, vocabulary, learning strategies, and authentic language. This means that materials must cover most of the aspects related to language acquisition. Lastly, it is relevant to mention that the inclusion of learning skills and strategies allow students to understand their own learning process and become aware of their role in it.

In regard to the components of materials development, Tomlinson (2000) remarked the importance of providing students with meaningful tasks that allow them to understand meaning and store the new knowledge in their long-term memory. To do so, Tomlinson proposed the multi-dimensional approach, which entails using all the resources offered by our minds. This can be done by achieving a sensory and affective experience of the text, connecting new knowledge to previous experiences; and relating the text to our own interests, views, and needs. Moreover, according to Núñez, Pineda, and Téllez (2004), MD “should not turn into a meaningless task with the sole purpose of enjoying and keeping the students busy” (p. 130). Therefore, teachers should take the most advantage of materials so that students become the protagonists of their own learning process.

Adapted materials. It is well known that not all the existing resources can be implemented with all types of students since all individuals have different characteristics depending on their context. That is why many teachers have decided to modify the materials so that they meet their learners' specific needs and interests. Masuhara (2004) affirmed that materials adaptation makes the existing materials more suitable for any context, covering both students' necessities and teachers' requirements. Similarly, Rico (2005) stated that “there is not

any ideal textbook to teach English, therefore the teacher should adapt the material to suit the particular learning situations” (p. 1). Consequently, adapted materials might fulfill the goals of any class if they contain adequate activities that respond to the learners’ needs and the context in which they are implemented.

It is worth noticing that I took into consideration the categories suggested by Masuhara (2004) for developing the materials implemented in my pedagogical intervention that, as previously mentioned, responds to the students’ need to learn vocabulary for improving their reading comprehension. The three categories proposed by the scholar are called plus, minus and zero. The plus category refers to the addition and expansion of content; the minus category entails actions like deletion, subtraction and reduction of content and/or activities; and, the zero category permits the teacher to replace, modify, reorganize or re-sequence activities, texts, instructions, illustrations, genres, and mediums. In short, there are plenty of possibilities that teachers can explore to adapt their materials based on the context.

Principles in SLA. Developing materials requires considering certain guidelines that ensure their success. In this regard, Tomlinson (2010) established six main SLA principles that allow teachers to create coherent materials both based on clear purposes and addressed to specific settings. According to Tomlinson (2010), it is possible to achieve this coherence by keeping in mind the following aspects: theories of language acquisition, teaching principles, the way in which the target language is used, and the systematic observation and evaluation of materials. In light of this, the six SLA principles proposed by the scholar are: providing students with the chance to use the language, giving the learners clues to identify features of true language, developing activities that include peers’ interaction to encourage communication, giving feedback after activities, calling students’ attention in terms of learning and enjoyment, and stimulating the growth of the intellectual, artistic and emotional dimensions. It is paramount to

follow these principles when developing materials because they let the students know the real use of language, guide their learning process through a communicative approach, give the learners the opportunity to evaluate their performance and identify their strengths and weaknesses, maintain students' interest, and stimulate multiple intelligences.

Materials development frameworks. Developing materials involves following a sequence of stages that allow teachers not only to create materials based on the students' needs and expectations, but also to assess their effectiveness. Thus, several authors like Masuhara (1998), Jolly and Bolitho (1998), Graves (1997), and Núñez and Téllez (2009) have designed some MD frameworks that guide materials developers on the stages they should follow. It is important to highlight that all of these authors coincide in the pertinence of starting the materials development process with a needs' analysis to identify the learners' characteristics, strengths and weaknesses. For instance, Jolly and Bolitho (1998) suggested the exploration of skills and the contextual consciousness, which allows teachers to identify the context of students and design inclusive and meaningful materials.

Likewise, all the frameworks highlight the necessity to establish general and specific goals so that teachers have a clear horizon and create all the activities based on the outcomes that students are expected to achieve. On the same spirit, the scholars included in their frameworks either the selection of the contents or the design of a syllabus where all the topics are organized and sequenced, thereby facilitating the scaffolding in every class.

By the same token, another stage that Jolly and Bolitho (1998) consider essential is the creation, adaption, and revision of materials, which they referred to as the "physical production of materials" (p. 97). This stage is indispensable in MD because it permits teachers to adjust their resources according to the characteristics of the population. Núñez and Téllez (2009) proposed a similar stage that implies piloting and adjusting materials before applying them. This stage allows

materials developers to consider possible changes and correct mistakes. In the same line of thought, Masuhara (1998) established a phase that entails testing and evaluating materials by implementing them with a different population, providing teachers with real information on what needs to be modified.

Finally, Graves (1997) remarked the relevance of carrying out an analysis of constraints. Knowing these limitations permit teachers, materials developers and researchers to make better decisions when selecting or adapting materials. Besides, the analysis of constraints provide teachers with information on the activities that cannot be included in the materials due to the lack of space, time, and infrastructure, among others.

Typology of materials. In general terms, there are two types of materials: Authentic and inauthentic. The first ones are created for transmitting real messages in real-life situations such as pieces of news, novels, magazines, etc. The second ones are exclusively designed to facilitate the language learning.

The worksheets that designed are characterized by two main aspects: Firstly, the adaptations that I did in reading passages taken from several teaching resources. I did so because, as sustained by Masuhara (2004), adapting materials make them suitable for any context and population's requirements. Secondly, all the activities included in the worksheets are teacher-made, which makes them "relevant and personalized, answering the need of the learners in a way no other material can" (Ur, 1996, p. 192). Both of these aspects make the worksheets that I created inauthentic materials as they were produced for specific learning purposes.

Inauthentic materials. As mentioned above, inauthentic materials are produced with an educational purpose. Montijano (2014) defined this type of materials as "exercises and tasks designed by teachers to facilitate students' involvement" (p. 15). The worksheets in this study

were created to ease students' learning process, considering their contextual features and all the difficulties they had in terms of reading comprehension.

Despite I recognize the importance of using authentic materials for the development of language learning, they were not a suitable option for this study due to the low English level of the participants. As ascertained by Mousavi and Iravani (2011) "non-authentic materials benefit students to a considerable degree" (p. 25). Hence, from my point of view, seventh graders from German Arciniegas school require the implementation of authentic materials that guide them slowly on their learning process. However, there will be a point in which these students feel more confident with the foreign language and need to practice their knowledge with authentic materials.

Teacher-made materials. Most of the inauthentic materials are developed by teachers in accordance with the requirements of the class. Núñez and Téllez (2009) described inauthentic materials as "a learning-teaching exercise, a task, an activity, a lesson, a unit or a module composed by one or two units" (p. 175). In this study, the worksheets consist of a large number of teacher-made activities divided in five lessons. These worksheets respond to a series of needs previously identified and analyzed. Similarly, Bedwell (2012) referred to teacher made materials using the concept of in-house approach, whose main benefit "is that it is completely responsive to local needs" (p. 1). Consequently, teacher-made materials are a great option to consider as they respond to specific purposes at school.

Materials for vocabulary learning. It has been mentioned that the worksheets implemented in this study not only deal with reading comprehension, but also with vocabulary because that is the basis for understanding a text. Nation (2011) affirmed that vocabulary teaching, as a component of a language course, should follow some principles to encourage learners to self-regulate their learning. These principles involve presenting to students the goals

of the course and designing resources based on the learners' needs and setting, Besides, materials should: (a) have a clear content, sequence, and presentation, and (b) be monitored and assessed. Having these aspects into consideration will allow students to reflect on their own vocabulary and language learning.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary constitutes the second construct of this study due to its importance in improving reading comprehension. Although vocabulary is the smallest component of every single language, it involves meaning, understanding and communication possibilities. To this respect, Wilkins (as cited in Thornbury, 2011) claimed that “without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed” (p. 13). Because of this, vocabulary needs to be addressed when working on any communicative skill.

More specifically, in regard to reading comprehension, Walter (as cited in Maley, 2013) argued that “readers need a minimum threshold” (p.223) of second language competence before starting to develop their reading abilities. That threshold can be initially achieved by working on vocabulary, which is one of the first needed tools to learn a foreign language. Moreover, essential aspects like self-esteem and confidence might be increased after getting students work on vocabulary. This confidence and vocabulary acquaintance will lead students to read more, thereby acquiring more knowledge about the world (Maley, 2013). As well as this, Grabe and Stoller (1997) mentioned that “reading and vocabulary are reciprocally causal” (p. 119); hence, one is improved by working on the other.

Having explained why working on vocabulary is necessary to enhance reading comprehension, it is pertinent to delve into its definition. According to Jackson and Amvela (2007), vocabulary is “the total stock of words in a language” (p.14) and it is usually associated and compared to concepts like lexis and lexicon, whose difference lies in the linguistic and

technical uses given to each word. In fact, the term vocabulary is less technical than “lexis” or “lexicon”. Additionally, Miller (as cited in Ma, 2009) defined vocabulary as thousands of words characterized by their spelling, sound, meaning, role, use and history. It can be observed that the first definition is too general and presents vocabulary as a list of words; on the contrary, the second one includes some contextual aspects of each word. Those aspects contribute to build what is called vocabulary knowledge.

Receptive and productive vocabulary. Along with the language skills, vocabulary has been divided into receptive and productive knowledge. Schmitt (2001) declared that receptive knowledge is related to the ability of understanding a word by listening or reading it. On the contrary, productive knowledge implies producing a word by speaking or writing. Receptive and productive knowledge are also recognized as passive and active vocabulary respectively (Gairns & Redman, 2001). These types of knowledge demonstrate that learning vocabulary entails not only understanding the meaning of the words, but also producing messages with them in specific activities.

Types of word knowledge. Word knowledge is associated to all the possibilities and ways in which a person can use the vocabulary. According to Nation (as cited in Schmitt, 2001) the different kinds of word knowledge are related to “meaning, written form, spoken form, grammatical behavior, collocations, register, association, and frequency” (p. 5). This means that word knowledge implies more than identifying the meaning of the vocabulary; it implies using words in all the language skills both receptively and productively. It entails connecting words and using them according to the context. In this sense, it is vital that students master word knowledge so that they are able to understand and communicate written or spoken messages.

High frequency vocabulary. English language is composed by a set of words that appear recurrently in every single text; most of them are prepositions, linking words or determiners.

According to the class observations, these are the words that seventh graders look up in the dictionary the most. In this regard, Aebersold and Field (1998) affirmed that frequency words are the ones that readers “encounter most frequently” (p. 138); hence, they need to be learned before reading a text. In addition, high frequency vocabulary is related to the concept of threshold established by Laufer (1997), which he understands as the minimum language knowledge required to start a formal reading process. In light of this, it is crucial that language learners- especially beginners- build up solid bases on vocabulary so that they are able to understand, at first, key elements like high frequency words.

Topic-specific or content-specific vocabulary. Similar to high frequency words, topic-specific or content-specific vocabulary is related to the amount of times certain words appear in a text. Aebersold and Field (1998) defined topic-specific vocabulary as the “group of words that appear frequently in a specific text because of their relation to the main topic” (p.139). This kind of vocabulary should be taught explicitly before any reading activity, thereby facilitating learners to understand the main ideas of the texts. Likewise, these authors claimed that topic-specific vocabulary is a “vehicle to frame meaning to understand and remember words” (p.140). Therefore, approaching topic-specific or content-specific vocabulary is a strategy to get learners to know the context of the reading texts and organize the pieces of information in accordance with a general idea.

Semantic field or lexical sets. Working on vocabulary also implies bearing in mind its semantic aspects. According to Gairns and Redman (2001), a lexical set is a group of words organized on the basis of similar categories like meaning, topic, pairs, etc. Those sets share a semantic relationship and work as strategies for helping our minds put things together. Thus, their main purpose is to create meaning associations among words to ease their understanding and use (Maley, 2013). In this way, semantic fields provide students with the possibility to learn new

vocabulary by grouping the words in categories, which permits to organize the written information and keep it in the mind. All in all, lexical sets not only promote the memorization of vocabulary, but also allow students to infer meaning in context easily.

Explicit teaching and incidental learning. These two strategies involve learning vocabulary both explicitly, by formal instruction, and incidentally, by meeting new words in contexts different from the classroom. On the one hand, explicit vocabulary teaching is a necessary strategy that builds the threshold in beginners and opens the door to language use. It requires the implementation of a curriculum that recycles the words so that students do not to forget them easily. On the other hand, the incidental learning entails trying to understand a word in context with no extra explanation about its meaning. Nevertheless, a learner needs to meet the same word numerous times to retain it, and possibly, the only way to do it is by reading extensively (Schmitt, 2001). Since controlling students' language learning outside the classroom is not an easy task, teachers are challenged to create materials and plan their classes considering at least the characteristics of explicit teaching. Unfortunately, carrying out activities concerning incidental learning is difficult at a public school due to the social context and the lack of resources. Thus, this is a strategy that takes place when students are more autonomous and practice the language outside the classroom.

Challenges for the L2 learner. Learners must usually deal with unknown vocabulary and unfamiliar uses of words. In this regard, Thornbury (2011) declared that some of the most common challenges the students face when learning vocabulary in an L2 are making connections between form and meaning and producing language by using the correct form of words. However, one of the ways in which students can overcome these challenges is establishing associations and producing language constantly to evince their knowledge.

In the same line of thought, Snow and Kim (2007) mentioned that these hindrances can be reduced by using meaningful texts, giving students the opportunity to encounter words several times in distinct contexts, focusing instruction on spelling, designing mechanisms to learn about words instead of memorizing vocabulary lists, teaching word forms, working on multiple meaning words and inferring meaning. To sum up, it is important to highlight that vocabulary is a challenge not only for students, but also for teachers in terms of materials development, procedures and methodologies.

Vocabulary learning instruction. Teaching vocabulary requires that EFL teachers ask themselves about the best strategies and resources to ease the students' learning. Zimmerman (1997) argued that vocabulary has not been given the same importance as pronunciation and grammar, as well as he highlighted its relevance on language teaching. Likewise, there have been discussions between memorization and internalization of language; and between skills sequencing and assessment of word structures. Zimmerman stated that although lexicon is central to language learning, it has not been a priority in the classrooms. Therefore, he proposed vocabulary learning instruction as a great possibility to conduct research studies in the in EFL settings. Having emphasized on the necessity to integrate vocabulary in the EFL classes, it is also vital to consider the pertinence of using learning strategies that favor the acquisition of lexicon.

Vocabulary learning strategies. Learning strategies are considered in this study as tools to deal with the vocabulary instruction process. Scarcella and Oxford (1992) defined learning strategies as “specific actions, behaviors, stages or techniques to tackle a difficult language task realized by students to learn” (p. 63). Therefore, vocabulary learning strategies refer to those actions implemented by the learner to complete a language task. Besides, Ellis (as cited in Takač, 2008) argued that learning strategies help students to make conscious efforts for their own

learning and store vocabulary in their long-term memory. In this sense, learning strategies contribute to students' self-investment and awareness of their own process.

With respect to the types of vocabulary learning strategies, Schmitt and McCarthy (1997) established the following categories: First, discovery or determination which provide students with the possibility to "gain knowledge" about words (p. 13). These strategies are the most implemented in any classroom and they embrace alternatives such as the use of reference materials like dictionaries, asking for meaning, and guessing from the context.

The second category involves the social or consolidation strategies, which help learners to process information and use modeling to imitate. They imply group activities, allowing students to interact with the language in class. When using social strategies, learners feel more confident because they work with students whose language level is alike, so they do not feel ashamed of making mistakes and usually support each other.

The third category corresponds to memory strategies or mnemonics compound. They are a set of strategies focused on making students retrieve information from memory and they are usually associated to mental processing. Their goal is to link the new knowledge to the previous one, guaranteeing the storage of language in the long-term memory. Memory strategies include the use of pictures or images, related words, unrelated words, grouping, word's orthographical or phonological form, meanings, paraphrasing, chunks of words and physical actions.

The fourth category deals with the cognitive strategies that aim at making vocabulary mechanical by means of written and verbal repetition. Word lists and flash cards are examples of this strategy. Besides, cognitive strategies entail individual actions like taking notes, using the vocabulary sections of textbooks for studying, labeling objects, and working on vocabulary notebooks. Even though cognitive strategies are considered individual actions, they are usually considered in teachers' instruction.

The fifth category refers to metacognitive strategies, which are known for being methods that aid students to understand the way they learn. These strategies allow students not only to learn by themselves, but also to control and evaluate their own learning process according to their personal characteristics. It is advisable to encourage students to employ these strategies as they foster their autonomy and self-learning; in fact, they let the individuals acquire or practice the language in accordance with their own learning styles. Considering this, an autonomous student will look for various resources to get language input, and he/she will evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy selected. It is worth noticing that due to the characteristics of the population in this study and their lack of motivation towards learning a foreign language, the metacognitive strategies still represent a challenge in the English class.

Reading

Considering the research question that leads this study, the last construct for this literature review is reading. Alderson (as cited in Wallace, 2001) affirmed that reading abilities in a second language depend on language development; because of this, reading difficulties are not just reading problems, they are also language problems. Walter (as cited in Maley, 2013) supported this statement by defining comprehension as a cognitive skill that may get stuck when the learner has not developed enough language knowledge. Under these circumstances, reading comprehension might be conceived as one of the goals a student could get when overpassing a basic language knowledge.

After pondering the relationship among language development, language knowledge and reading, it is pertinent to describe what reading means for some authors. First of all, Smith (2004) defined reading as an “interpreting experience” (p. 2) in which individuals make sense of written words. When reading, students integrate the texts to a wide context, thereby interpreting and understanding events; this process is better known as comprehension. According to Smith,

comprehension is the purpose of reading and learning how to read. This comprehension deals with “relating aspects of the world around us—including what we read—to the knowledge, intentions, and expectations we already have in our head” (p. 13). In short, reading is not only a process related to decoding written information, but also a way to integrate the previous knowledge of the world based on individual experiences.

By the same token, Grellet (1981) mentioned a set of elements that can be read by anyone. He listed written texts in general and added plays, nursery rhymes, advertisements, warnings, posters, road signs, cartoons, maps, pictures, and diagrams. This wide vision of reading entails comprehending information from any context, even if it is not written for a learning purpose. He also highlighted the importance of setting clear reading purposes and implementing a variety of activities centered on the different kinds of readings. Finally, teachers need to bear in mind that not all the reading tasks should be focused on understanding the meaning of every single word in a text.

Intensive reading. Most of the times reading is developed as a guided practice due to the students’ lack of language knowledge; this may be considered as extensive reading. Brown (2001) stated that silent reading is composed of intensive and extensive reading. The main purpose of intensive reading is “understanding literal meaning” (p. 312) and developing classroom-oriented activities by considering the linguistic and semantic features of a text. On the contrary, extensive reading is the one developed by students outside the school and for pleasure.

Intensive reading is usually worked with beginners due to their basic knowledge concerning the foreign language, while extensive reading is more related to the development of general understanding, reading strategies, and reading for pleasure. To this respect, Maley and Prowse (1997) sustained that intensive reading embraces deconstructing the text and answering detailed questions. They also pointed out that intensive reading is “demotivating” for students

because it has been used as a pretext for teaching grammar and vocabulary. In synthesis, it is essential to ascertain the language proficiency of the learners to choose the best kind of reading they need.

Reading comprehension. To understand what the aim of this study is, it is necessary to explore the concept of reading comprehension. Smith (2004) described comprehension as a synonym for understanding; their only difference lies in is how frequent they are used. The word understanding is commonly used in any setting, while the word comprehension is mainly used in the reading context. Likewise, Smith explained that reading comprehension is the result of establishing relations among the reading text, the world knowledge, the reader's expectations, and the reading intentions. Therefore, reading comprehension is a process that requires basic concepts, vocabulary and cultural background. It is not enough to know hundreds of words if there is not a context or a connection to real life.

In the same line of thought, Grellet (1981) affirmed that reading comprehension involves the development of a huge quantity of skills; for example, recognizing the script language and understanding explicit and not explicit information, conceptual meaning, communicative function, and relations within the sentences. He also added skills like transcoding information, scanning for specific information, extracting relevant points in the text for summarizing, distinguishing main ideas, and supporting details and main points. In light of this, reading comprehension cannot be understood as the mere process of decoding because, as stated above, it involves different complex skills.

It is also important to realize that the previous knowledge about the world and the life experiences have a great influence on the way a person understands explicit and non-explicit information. That is why the academic knowledge is not the only condition to reach good reading comprehension levels, it is also necessary to have a wide cultural background. All together, it is

crucial to work on reading comprehension considering its complexity and having in mind all the skills that it requires.

Reading techniques. Most reading techniques are widely developed when learning to read in the L1; however, this is not that simple in the L2 because of the unfamiliar words and sentences. Grellet (1981) asserted that reading techniques should ensure learners not to fall on every language difficulty or get discouraged on their reading process. To avoid students' lack of enthusiasm, Grellet proposed the following reading techniques: inferring, understanding relations within the sentence, linking sentences and ideas, predicting, previewing, anticipating, skimming and scanning. It is important to mention that in this study it is not possible to design materials based on all these reading techniques, mainly because of students' language level and the short quantity of time they have per class.

The reading techniques selected for this study were: (a) inferring, that implies discovering the meaning of unknown words through syntactic, logical, and cultural clues, (b) recognizing the relations within the sentence, which involves finding the subject and the action easily, and analyzing the key elements that each sentence provides for understanding the whole passage, (c) linking sentences and ideas to start working on textual cohesion. This technique is focused on understanding reference and linking words as part of a text, which must be considered as a web of related ideas, and (d) predicting, that refers to guessing what is to come next through grammatical, logical, and cultural clues. In short, seventh graders were encouraged to use these techniques as they favored their reading comprehension and allowed them to understand the texts by themselves.

Understanding meaning. Besides suggesting the reading techniques, Grellet (1981) claimed that understanding meaning is a strategy that also fosters the improvement of the reading comprehension. In this sense, learners can be asked to give non-linguistic or linguistic responses

of the text. In reference to the first category, diagrams or pictures can be added to the text so that students can make relations between the text and the diagram. In this regard, it is worth noticing that students usually develop their skills through comparisons, transpositions, and the use of information to solve problems and make decisions. In relation to the linguistic responses, learners must reorganize information according to patterns and chronologies.

In general, understanding meaning strategies open the possibility to explore a text by using different tools and demonstrate that comprehension questions are not the only way to check understanding. In addition, the non-linguistic and linguistic responses prevent beginners from getting stuck when developing post reading activities because language can be simplified considering the particularities of the group. After exploring the literature review underlying this research study, chapter three is introduced as the holder of the methodological approach.

Chapter III

Methodological Design

After considering the research question and the literature review underlying this study, this chapter presents the information related to the methodological design. It is organized in two main sections: the research design and the instructional design.

Research Design

The research design encompasses the qualitative research approach and the action research. It also presents the participants and the data gathering instruments selected according to the characteristics of this study: students' artifacts, field notes, and focus group interviews.

Approach. The approach that best fits this study is the qualitative research. According to Flick (2009), qualitative research is considered as the main tool to study social relationships characterized for their pluralization. He used this term to refer to the variety of worlds in a group of human beings, which makes difficult to standardize behaviors, thoughts, customs and beliefs. As a result, this research approach permits teachers to consider and study the significance of human diversity. Likewise, Richards (2003) described qualitative research as a method to “make our understanding of the social world” (p. 15), implying an effort to figure out solutions for social problems in context. Besides, he established some features of qualitative research: the study of human actors individually or in a small group, the relevance of analyzing the context or natural setting, the analysis of actions' meaning, and the possibility to create relationships among them.

Type of study. To develop this study, it was necessary not only to observe and identify the difficulties that students presented in regard to reading comprehension, but also to propose a solution. That is why, I decided to use the action research which, according to Mills (as cited in Donato, 2003), is conducted by teacher- researchers whose actions are focused on gathering

information about specific aspects related to the teaching and learning processes. To this respect, Burns (2009) argued that action research is a “reflective practice” (p. 2), in which a teacher-researcher self-reflects and criticizes his/her teaching context. In consequence, action research intends to propose strategies that improve the teaching practices through reflection and positive changes, thereby benefiting the students’ outcomes. Moreover, Wallace (as cited in Donato, 2003) mentioned some relevant aspects that characterize this type of study: the small quantity of participants, the necessity of considering the context and its features, and the intention of developing innovative strategies that change the educational practices. Lastly, Burns (2009) stressed that another characteristic of action research is the need to collect data that show the students’ attitudes and improvements. Correspondingly, I used students’ artifacts, field notes, and focus group interviews to identify the learners’ perception towards the pedagogical intervention and their progress in terms of reading comprehension.

As in any process, action research must follow certain stages. Kemmis and McTaggart (as cited in Burns, 2009) suggested a cycle of four stages that I kept in mind to conduct this study: planning, action, observation, and reflection. It is necessary to clarify that this cycle can be repeated until the researcher obtains a satisfactory outcome. Thus, when starting the second cycle, planning changes its name to revised plan.

Participants. In this research study, the participants were a group of 35 seventh graders students and the teacher as teacher-researcher and text-developer.

Students. This action research involved 35 seventh graders (15 boys and 20 girls) between 13 to 15 years old. They are all students at German Arciniegas Public School. One of the main characteristics of this group is that this is the first time they have a certified English teacher at school. Besides, they receive three hours of English class a week, which implies a bigger challenge in terms of learning and teaching

The technique used to select the participants was the convenience sampling. According to Flick (2008), this technique permits the researcher to select a sample from a group to represent the whole population. This method allows the researcher to generalize findings and make decisions about the logic he/she wants to follow. In this regard, Marshall (1996) described convenience sampling as the least demanding technique for a researcher given its easy accessibility. Convenience sampling allows researchers to select a sample from a population according to their own criteria, research needs, and possibilities. Despite this it is not a rigorous sampling procedure, it is valid to select the participants, conduct a research study, and generalize findings. All in all, I chose these students because I am their English teacher; thus, I had the opportunity to implement the pedagogical intervention in my classes.

Teacher-researcher and text developer. As a teacher, it was my responsibility to plan the classes according to the curriculum and the schedule established by the school. I was also in charge of evaluating the students' process in language learning, designing actions to improve their difficulties, and strengthening their social relationships. As a teacher researcher, I conducted a research study to solve a problematic situation identified in the classroom; to do so, I used some data gathering instruments, analyzed the information, and documented the learning and teaching experiences. Finally, as a materials developer, I designed and implemented contextualized worksheets based on on the SLA principles and the MD frameworks.

Data gathering instruments. The data gathering instruments selected for this study were: students' artifacts, field notes, and focus group interviews. All of them were chosen in light of the research question, the population, and the existing resources in that context.

Students' artifacts. In this study, the students' artifacts correspond to the worksheets developed by the seventh graders (See Appendix B). Kafai (2006) described this instrument as students' creations during the class or instruction time. Some of their features are their durability,

tangibility, and the purpose of being public objects. Besides, students' artifacts are tools used in the classroom to make knowledge visible. Thence, it is possible to affirm that every student's activity done in the classroom can be considered as an artifact. Lastly, as students' artifacts are tangible learning elements, they can be analyzed easily because the information is long-lasting in time and solid.

Field notes. I used this instrument to register relevant information while students worked on the activities proposed (See Appendix C). Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, and Namey (2005) defined field notes as handwritten notes that permit the researcher to keep record of the activities done in class every time a teacher is a participant observer. Teachers usually create field notebooks or field notes forms to keep information saved and organized. Moreover, Hatch (2002) mentioned that field notes give form to observation in a setting as they contain descriptions of the context, actions, and conversations. Those notes must be detailed and include impressions and preliminary interpretations too. Consequently, the field notes that I used allowed me to register detailed, organized, and contextualized information when being a participant observer.

Focus group interviews. I used interviews mainly to evaluate the pedagogical intervention (See Appendix D). Mack et al. (2005) declared focus group interviews are a "qualitative data collection method in which one or two researchers and several participants meet as a group to discuss a given research topic" (p. 51). The way to keep record of these sessions are audios or videos. The researcher designs open-ended questions and a second researcher takes detailed notes of the development of the interview. A feature of focus group interview is that, in a short period of time, many pieces of important information are collected. Besides, Hatch (2002) pointed out that focus groups are centered on the data generated by the interaction among the participants. Hence, this is one of the best instruments to collect data as it permits the participants to express their opinions. In summary, focus group interviews are excellent data gathering

instruments for two main reasons: Firstly, because of the quantity and quality of the information collected in a short time process; and secondly, because of its informality.

Instructional Design

The instructional design of this study explores the characteristics of the pedagogical intervention, its instructional objectives, and the reasons to consider this intervention an innovation. It also encompasses the second language acquisition principles that guide this intervention, the theory of the nature of language and language learning, the methodological approach underlying the pedagogical intervention, and the connection of the pedagogical intervention with the research question.

Pedagogical intervention. The pedagogical intervention of this study involves the design and implementation of worksheets based on vocabulary learning strategies to contribute to seventh graders reading comprehension at a public school. This pedagogical intervention is based on the vocabulary learning strategies and the principles established by the lexical approach (identifying chunks, matching, completing, categorizing, sequencing, and deleting). On the same spirit, it embraces the techniques used in the introduction of new vocabulary: written storage and visual, verbal, and memorization techniques (Gairns & Redman, 2001). Finally, the students engaged in activities in which they unconsciously explored the components of word language suggested by Nation (as cited in Read, 2000): form, position, function and meaning.

In relation to the materials implemented, I designed five worksheets with their corresponding self-assessment. The worksheets are divided into three stages: First, the presentation of new vocabulary and its lexical field. Second, a reading passage related to the topic and the vocabulary presented. In this stage the students explore and read the text. Third, reading techniques that lead the learners to improve their reading comprehension. Most of these techniques are focused on non-linguistic answers. I consider relevant to mention that the topics of

the reading passages were selected considering the students' characteristics and the curriculum proposed by the school. For this reason, a couple of topics from the course textbook were included in the worksheets.

For developing the materials, I considered the six SLA principles advocated by Tomlinson (1998). According to him, materials should: (a) be motivating to catch and sustain the students' attention, (b) make students feel relaxed and comfortable in their learning activities. That is why, I kept in mind the students' interests and abilities, (c) the third principle chosen for this study is supported by Dulay, Burt and Krashen (as cited in Núñez and Téllez, 2009) and it highlights the importance of building self-confidence as a way to make students learn faster, (d) be perceived by students as relevant and useful. Small (1997) highlighted that this principle can be complied by identifying the learners' needs, interests and expectations before developing the materials, (e) make students feel into a familiar situation, which encourages them to take part in the development of the designed activities; and, (f) give opportunities for self- investment, which is closely related autonomy. Thus, teachers' activities should be focused on self-discovery so that students recognize their own strengths and weaknesses.

Instructional objectives. The main objective of this pedagogical intervention is to design and implement five worksheets focused on vocabulary learning strategies, to foster reading comprehension in seventh grade students. The specific objectives are: (a) to create materials that address the students' needs and interests and expose them to vocabulary and reading strategies that help them improve their reading comprehension, (b) to generate an innovative and challenging environment where students can increase their vocabulary to improve reading comprehension, (c) to help students become aware of the importance of actively use vocabulary learning strategies and learn new vocabulary.

Intervention as innovation. Innovation is nowadays a must in education. Markee (2001) defined innovation in language teaching as suggestions for changing materials, approaches, and values to be perceived as new by the participants of an education system. In this sense, innovation consists of a set of actions proposed to improve teaching and learning practices, avoiding traditional instruction and promoting new learning experiences among students. To this respect, Carless (2013) stated that innovation is “an attempt to bring about educational improvement by doing something which is perceived by implementers as new...or different” (p.1). In light of these perspectives, innovation involves proposing new pedagogical strategies that change positively the teaching practice.

Along similar lines, Carless mentioned that innovation is a “critically important field because the development of education rests in its hands” (p.1). Therefore, it is necessary that teachers stop repeating the same methodologies and explore new ways of facilitating and improving the students’ learning. Similarly, De Lano, Riley, and Crookes (1994) highlighted that the adaptation of pedagogical practices is a key factor of innovation. Consequently, teachers can adapt their teaching practice according to the context and their learners’ necessities, which is also considered as innovation. This statement is supported by Núñez, Téllez, and Castellanos (2017) when they affirmed that designing contextualized materials is an excellent opportunity for innovation. Therefore, all the members of the community will be impacted by the new set of actions implemented as part of the process of materials development. In addition, they highlighted the need to reflect on the teaching practices to improve both teaching and learning.

Concerning this pedagogical intervention, I identified the aspects that needed to be improved at German Arciniegas Public School: the lack of materials, the students’ limited vocabulary and their difficulty to comprehend reading texts. As a result, my intervention is innovative because it attempts to improve the issues mentioned above, as well as it entails the

creation of appealing and contextualized materials. In addition to this, the reading comprehension skill was not worked individually; on the contrary, it was built up on the basis of vocabulary learning, which was a new experience for the students.

It is important to clarify that this intervention was not only an innovation for students, but also for teachers, who can be inspired to create and adapt their own teaching materials; as Collonoy (2014) asserted, innovation is “part of an evolutionary process: small, forward-thinking changes that cumulatively have a big effect” (p. 7). Certainly, this intervention might be just the first stage to transform the local context.

Theory of the nature of language and language learning. The theoretical view of language that informs the English program at German Arciniegas Public School is the functional view, which according to Richards and Rodgers (2001), helps to use language as a vehicle to express functional meaning. This view emphasizes on the importance of developing language by fostering meaning and communication, rather than grammatical structures, which has been one of the main objectives in the English program of this school.

Moreover, the analytical learning is the vision that best fits my pedagogical intervention because it is related to the use and development of cognitive skills as part of the process of language learning. In this vision, language is considered a “linguistic and communicative system” (Tudor, 2001, p. 86) that can be learned inductively by recognizing its features and using them to communicate one’s thoughts. These theories of the nature of language and language learning are associated to the lexical approach due to the need of teaching language in terms of its functionality and as a tool for communicating meaning.

Methodological approach underlying the pedagogical intervention. The approach that best accounts for this pedagogical intervention is the lexical approach suggested by Lewis (1993). The principal aspects considered by this approach are both the importance of communicating

meaning and the lexical nature of language. This approach establishes two main principles: Firstly, to understand vocabulary not as isolated words, but as different kinds of multi-words chunks, which imply developing a phrasal lexicon. Secondly, to design activities that unify the teaching of grammar, lexis, and pronunciation chunks as lexical items. These principles embrace a division of lexicon into four groups: words, collocations or word partnerships, fixed expressions, and semi-fixed expressions. Due to that, language teaching must explore and combine language patterns and chunks to produce fluent language. In addition, one of the main concerns of this approach is to develop the learners' awareness when studying a language. This approach highlights the importance of creating vocabulary exercises according to the following lexical principles: identifying chunks, matching, completing, categorizing, sequencing, and deleting.

Natural and communicative approaches, like the lexical approach, place meaning communication in the center of language and language learning (Lewis, 1997). Krashen's and Terrell's natural approach (as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001) considered "communication as the primary function of language" (p. 129) and characterized learning as a "conscious process" (p. 131), which is related to the importance of learning awareness presented by Lewis (1997).

Connection of the pedagogical intervention with the research question. The research question was developed considering the language needs of the population analyzed. Hence, this study intends to propose some strategies to improve the students' vocabulary learning, which in turn enhances reading comprehension. The research question embraces three main constructs: First, materials development that deals with the design and implementation of the worksheets. Second, vocabulary learning strategies, which may be considered as methods to teach and learn vocabulary. Third, reading comprehension improvement, which is the ultimate goal of this study.

Suggested instructional phases. The instructional phases of this pedagogical intervention embrace the MD framework, the informed consent form, the sensitization process, and the implementation of materials.

Proposed material development framework. Considering the MD frameworks developed by Núñez and Téllez (2009), Masuhara (1998), Jolly and Bolitho (1998), and Graves (1997), I established some comparisons and differences among them to create my own framework in accordance to the context and needs of this study.

To begin with, all the frameworks coincide in the significance of starting this process with a needs' analysis so that materials are meaningful for the students. Jolly and Bolitho (1998) suggested that the subsequent stages should be the exploration of skills and the contextual realization. I also followed these two stages because I consider that considering the skills and context of my students might be an opportunity to know them better; and in that way, create suitable materials.

Second, it is necessary to establish the general and specific goals to know the outcomes that students are expected to achieve. Besides, it is advisable to organize the content or syllabus so that there is a logical sequence in the materials. The third stage involves creating or adapting the materials and; then, revising them, which is understood by Jolly and Bolitho (1998) as the "physical production of materials" (p. 97). The fourth stage, according to Núñez and Téllez (2009), should be piloting and adjusting the materials before applying them. The fifth stage, as proposed by Masuhara (1998), should embrace the evaluation of the materials, which opens the possibility to implement them in other populations. Finally, and in accordance with Graves's (1997) insights, it is necessary to carry out the analysis of the constraints, which makes the materials developers consider several design and procedural aspects not only when creating materials, but also when analyzing and making suggestions in general.

Informed consent form. Before implementing the materials, it was necessary to send an informed consent form (See Appendix A) to the students and parents. In this form, the objectives of this research study and the implications of the seventh graders' participation were clearly described. Besides, it explained that all the data gathered would be kept in confidentiality. This informed consent was considered as the approval to conduct this study with the selected population.

Sensitization. After getting the informed consents, it was necessary to explain the participants the benefits of participating in this pedagogical intervention. In this stage, I motivated students to work on the implementation with a positive attitude. It was also a time to make the learners conscious of the advantages of developing the language skills; in this case, vocabulary and reading comprehension in L2, which improves both their performance in the English class, and prepare them for the coming standardized national test. Finally, I explained the types of activities they would develop and the importance of making the most of the time.

Piloting and adjusting. Before implementing materials with the population described above, it was important to pilot them. This process was done with a group of five students from a similar group at the same school. They were given the worksheets to explore them and they made general comments about them in terms of form and content. In addition, they developed each worksheet and asked the researcher questions about the materials. With the information collected from students, adjustments in the materials were done during the process. After the piloting and adjusting process, the implementation of the materials began.

Implementation of the materials. The implementation of the materials comprised five worksheets (See Appendix B) whose topics were selected in accordance with the official English curriculum of the school. The following chart displays the components of the five worksheets:

Worksheet	Grammar topic and vocabulary focus	Vocabulary strategies	Reading techniques
1. Thinking back	Past simple Daily activities	Identifying chunks, matching	Ordering a sequence of pictures.
2. The vanished hitchhiker	Past simple Ghost stories	Completing, categorizing	Comparing texts and pictures.
3. What's the weather like?	Present continuous The weather forecast	Sequencing and deleting Related word paraphrasing	Completing a document - Mapping it out
4. Towards the future	Future simple Changes and problems in the future	Identifying chunks, (collocations) Matching (definitions) Unrelated words Antonyms	Using the information in the text - completing a document
5. Animal power	Future going to Going to the zoo	Completing, categorizing, Grouping words	Reorganizing the information: reordering events

The school chronogram was considered for organizing the dates for the implementation. Due to the high quantity of activities planned in the official chronogram, the piloting process and the implementation of the materials took ten weeks.

This methodological design comprised all the aspects related to the research and instructional design before implementing the materials and collecting data. In the following chapter, it is possible to find the analysis done after designing and implementing the materials, as well as the analysis of the information collected with the instruments proposed.

Chapter IV

Data Analysis

Data Analysis Procedure

This chapter encompasses the stages that I followed to analyze the data in light of the research question: How do the design and implementation of worksheets based on vocabulary learning strategies contribute to seventh graders' reading comprehension in a public school? Strauss, Corbin and Zimmerman (2002) affirmed that data analysis is the result of the interaction between the researcher and the data. Thus, I employed the grounded theory, the color-coding technique, and the triangulation method to establish the categories and subcategories of analysis drawn from the evidences collected through the data gathering instruments: students' artifacts, field notes, and focus group interviews.

The data analysis started by following some of the stages proposed by the grounded theory, considered by qualitative researchers as a procedure to analyze empirical situations and data to propose a theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). In this case, the empirical situations were the class sessions in which this intervention was implemented. Similarly, Glaser and Strauss (1999) defined the grounded theory as the "discovery of theory from data" (p. 1) in a process characterized by the hard systematization and analysis of the information gathered. This theory offers the researcher the possibility to describe, compare, explain and interpret data based on theoretical support.

In the same line of thought, Strauss and Corbin (1990) claimed that the grounded theory encompasses three procedures: developing, connecting categories, and then setting theoretical propositions. Considering these stages, it was necessary to analyze all the information collected by means of the data gathering instruments in the following order: First, I revised the data to develop categories. Then, I compared the findings to identify similar concepts and patterns.

Lastly, I interpreted and explained the data to set theoretical propositions. In consequence, the researcher cannot get to any final conclusion before analyzing and comparing the information; as sustained by Strauss et al. (2002), grounded theory must emerge from data, rejecting the idea of considering a theory before data analysis.

To examine the data, it was necessary to resort to color coding as a data reduction technique. Namey, Guest, Thairu, and Johnson (2008) argued that the data reduction techniques provide the possibility “to highlight trends, relationships, or associations for further analysis, without deemphasizing the importance of the context and richness of the data themselves” (p. 137). In this way, I used the color-coding technique to reduce the data I had in the field notes and the interviews’ transcripts. I highlighted keywords and short sentences that, according to Stottok, Bergaus and Gorra (2011), are called codes. Then, I used the relationships among codes to find concepts, and finally, interrelationships of concepts to find categories. All in all, color coding was useful to find connections and establish the categories and subcategories.

After analyzing the data and identifying categories and subcategories, it was necessary to verify their validity. To do so, I followed the triangulation process that, in Bouchard’s (1976) words, refers to the use of more than one method to validate the research process. Likewise, Flick (2014) declared that triangulation is a “strategy for the validation of the procedures and results of empirical social research” (p. 178). Therefore, triangulation is a significant stage in research because it ensures that the findings are supported by different types of evidence.

Two types of triangulation were used in the data analysis: Methodological triangulation and theoretical triangulation. Flick (2004) defined the first one as the combination of “data drawn from different sources and at different times, in different places or from different people” (p. 178). Consequently, I took evidences from all the data collection instruments: students’ artifacts, self-assessment open-ended questions, fieldnotes, and focus groups’ transcripts. It is worth

mentioning that the data sources in this study comply with all the characteristics mentioned by Flick in terms of time, place and origin. This type of triangulation helped me to strengthen the subcategories as I made sure that I had enough supporting information from all the instruments.

In regard to theory triangulation, Denzin and Lincoln (1998) pointed out that the researcher should use several theoretical views to interpret data. This implies citing authorities that have made contributions to the subject matter to understand and support the analysis. In this study, the theory triangulation was developed by including literature about the categories and subcategories proposed.

Research Categories

The following chart displays the categories and subcategories that emerged after analyzing the data. It also presents the research question and main objective of the study to show the coherence among all the elements:

Research question How do the design and implementation of worksheets based on vocabulary learning strategies contribute to seventh graders' reading comprehension in a public school?	Research objective To analyze the development of reading comprehension in seventh graders through worksheets based on vocabulary building strategies at a public school.
CATEGORIES	SUBCATEGORIES
Materials as a vehicle to trigger effective processes for reading comprehension.	Building understanding and confidence through teacher-made materials.
	Developing brain's potential via teaching resources in the materials.
L1 as a source to support vocabulary learning.	Heavy reliance on Spanish to figure out how new language works.
	Previous knowledge of words in English used in Spanish to figure out words.

Factors and strategies impacting reading comprehension.	<p>Language knowledge as a determinant factor for reading comprehension.</p> <p>Contributions of sharing and comparing knowledge to reading comprehension.</p>
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Materials as a vehicle to trigger effective processes for reading comprehension.

Considering the needs of the participants in this study, designing and implementing materials were an attempt to trigger effective processes for reading comprehension. Krashen (1985) stressed the importance of providing students with contextualized and comprehensible language experiences; that is why the materials were designed according to the students' learning pace, needs and context. This aided the students to build up understanding and confidence along the implementation, as well as it permitted them to develop their brain's potential. In Tomlinson's (2008) words, the learners were stimulated "to think and feel whilst experiencing" (p. 4). That set of actions had a positive impact on students' reading comprehension.

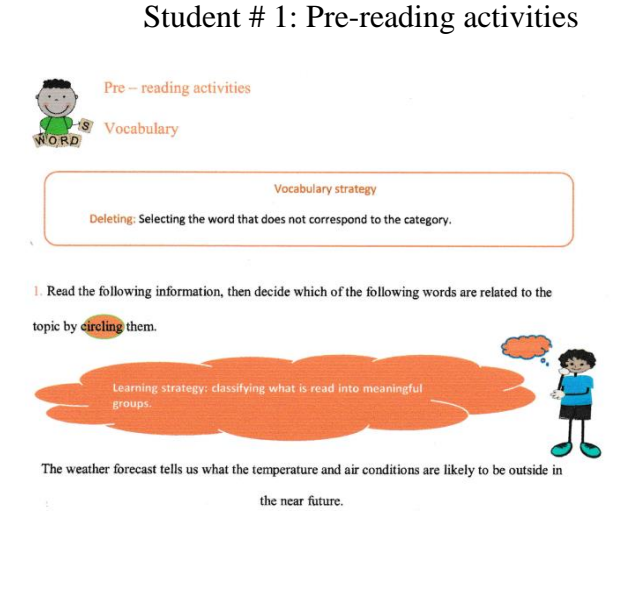
This category related to materials development is supported by the following subcategories: (a) *Building understanding and confidence through teacher-made materials*, and (b) *Developing brain's potential via teaching resources in the materials*.

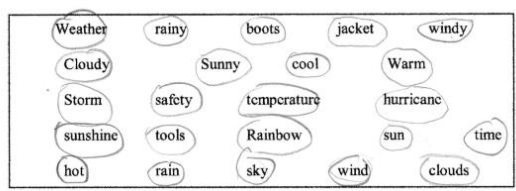
Building understanding and confidence through teacher-made materials. This subcategory deals with the relevance of building in students not only understanding and knowledge, but also confidence. Building understanding implies giving students enough time to comprehend the language and learn how to use it. Sato (1990) affirmed that L2 courses for beginners must be focused on meaning rather than form. Therefore, learners should be given some time to understand the language before they produce it. In line with this point of view, when the students decide by themselves to use the language for producing their own messages, they show exactly what they have comprehended, as well as they demonstrate that their

confidence has grown, which is a vital condition for reading comprehension and language production.

In this line of thought, Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) stated that faster learning is more likely to happen in self-assured students, demonstrating that learners need to feel confident before being exposed to any learning challenge. The following sample of the students' artifacts show that the worksheets were structured in such a way that the participants had opportunities of scaffolding. It is evident that students were provided with key words before working on any reading comprehension activity. Most of the words, expressions and sentences in the pre-reading activities were taken from the reading passages included in each worksheet, which prepared them to read the texts.

Student # 1: Pre-reading activities





(Students' artifact, Worksheet No 3)


It can be observed that the pre-reading activities were intended to engage the students in the recognition of vocabulary. First, the vocabulary strategy was explained; and then, students read some information about the context of the worksheet, so they could remember related words, no matter if it was in their mother tongue. This is an example of this:

Student # 1: Pre-reading activities


Vocabulary strategy


Completing: for completing sentences, it is necessary to keep in mind aspects related to context, grammar, vocabulary and comprehension, to locate the corresponding word accordingly.


2. Change the following images for the previous words to make sense of these sentences.






Learning strategy: placing new words into context.


a) Today is a  windy day! ✓

b) Next Thursday will be  sunny. ✓

c) Weather conditions will be severe, there will be a  hurricane. ✓

d) It can be,  rainy,  cloudy or windy. ✓

e) If you are lucky, you may be able to see a  rainbow. ✓

f) You must be prepared in case of a  storm. ✓

How do you think **deleting** and **completing** strategies worked for you? Share your insights with a partner and then your teacher?

(Students' artifact, Worksheet No 3)

In this second activity, students had to complete sentences according to the pictures and the vocabulary worked in the previous in activity. It is important to mention that, while doing the activities, the students were allowed to talk to each other so that they were able to increase their confidence and find an appropriate answer for the exercises. The participants found this activity funny and easy; it encouraged them to keep working on vocabulary by making associations between images and words. Besides, they started their reading process by making sense of the sentences and using the context. In the end, there was a question in which students had to express what vocabulary strategy the best was for them. This question was included to check the learners' understanding of the strategies and the way they were using them.

The third activity included a matching vocabulary exercise as a learning strategy. First, students unscrambled the words to work on spelling and identification; then, they matched the pictures with the corresponding words as it is illustrated in the next sample:

Student # 1: Pre-reading activities

Vocabulary strategy

Matching: The matching activities are focused on finding a corresponding, suitably associated, or harmonious

3. Unscramble the following words, then match them to the corresponding picture.

Learning strategy: using imagery. Relating new language information to concepts in memory.

Unscramble	Word	Picture
dwin	<u>wind</u>	
oolc	<u>cool</u>	
airn	<u>rain</u>	
toh	<u>hot</u>	
clsdou	<u>clouds</u>	
wrma	<u>war'm</u>	

(Students' artifact, Worksheet No 3)

The fourth activity was related to lexical chunks, which are understood as words that are commonly found together like collocations, phrasal verbs and expressions. Correspondingly, when learning vocabulary, it is essential to understand that words have to be seen as a system and not as isolated words because their meaning depends on others. Students were explained the vocabulary strategy, the vocabulary to be used, and they were given an example on how to complete the expressions. After this process, the students easily found how to complete the chunks by looking for similarities between the categories of the words and analyzing their form. In addition, the learners were inquired about the usefulness of the strategies included in this section when working on vocabulary activities.

Student # 1: Pre-reading activities

Vocabulary strategy

Identifying Chunks: A lexical chunk is a group of words that are commonly found together. Lexical chunks include collocations but these usually just involve content words, not grammar.

4. Complete the following expressions looking at the examples and using the expressions in the chart.

Learning strategy: recognizing and using formulas and patterns.

Listening to	My house -- the school	air	Numerical data	sunny	teachers
--------------	------------------------	-----	----------------	-------	----------


Temperature conditions.	<u>air</u> conditions ✓
It can be rainy.	It can be <u>sunny</u> ✓
Watching the weather forecasts.	<u>listening to</u> the weather forecasts. ✓
Getting information	Getting <u>numerical data</u> ✓
From one place to another.	From <u>my house</u> to <u>the school</u> ✓
Weather forecasts are not always right.	<u>teachers</u> are not always right. ✓

How do you think **matching** and **identifying chunks** strategies worked for you? Share your insights with a partner and then your teacher?

(Students' artifact, Worksheet No 3)

The listening activity planned for this worksheet was based on a simple weather forecast in which students had to identify the vocabulary previously worked. Listening activities are an excellent strategy to reinforce vocabulary learning because they give students the possibility to get a different input from the skill they are working on. The subsequent instance demonstrates that students completed this activity successfully.


Student # 1: Listening activity



Listening activity

5. Listen carefully and match the two parts of the sentences:

Learning strategy: using key words. Remembering new word by using auditory and visual links.



dry and cloudy

windy

cloudy and sunny

rainy

a) The weather in the north is mostly

Windy

b) The weather in the east is mostly

rainy

c) The weather in the west is mostly

dry and cloudy

d) The weather in the south is mostly

cloudy and sunny

(Students' artifact, Worksheet No 3)

After working on vocabulary and its components, it was time for the students to continue with the reading comprehension activities. The participants were suggested to read the text a first time to identify both the words they had worked in class, and the ones they did not know. After that, they could read the passage confidently. The following image is an example of an activity in which students were asked about literal information and their interpretation of the text:

Student # 1: While-reading activities

practice/weather-forecast


While – reading activities:

Reading activity

6. Read the following text and then complete the document:

Learning strategy: Making associations, relating new language information to concepts already in memory.

What's the forecast?



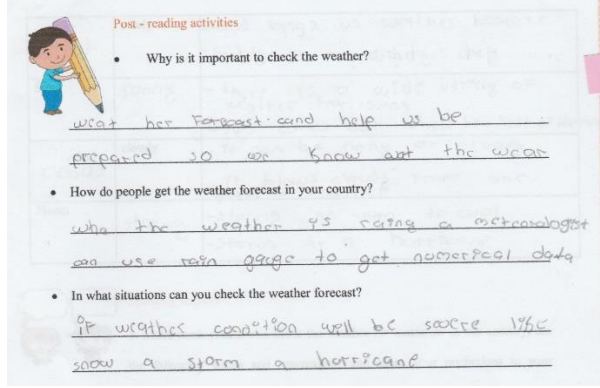
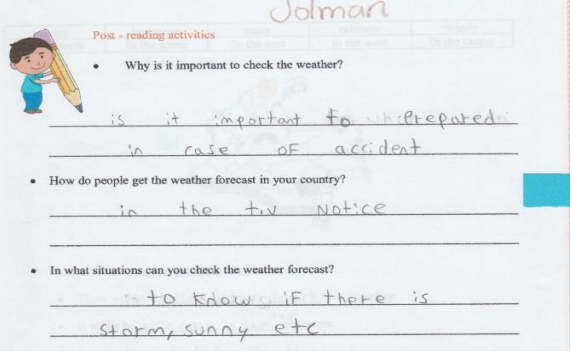
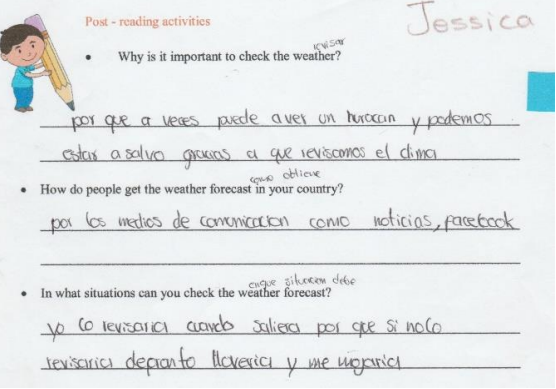
Newspapers
WEATHER REPORT

The weather forecast tells us what the temperature and air conditions are likely to be outside in the near future. There is a wide variety of weather, from sunny to stormy and (warm to cool). It can be rainy or cloudy or windy. Listening to or watching the weather forecast can help us be prepared so we know what to wear. If weather conditions will be severe, like snow, a storm or a hurricane, getting information ahead of time can help us prepare so we can stay safe. A meteorologist is a person whose job it is to

Varieties of the weather		
1. <u>Sunny</u>	2. <u>Warm</u>	3. <u>cool</u>
Severe conditions		
1. <u>snow</u>	2. <u>storm</u>	3. <u>hurricane</u>
Meteorologist tools		
1. <u>thermometer</u>	2. <u>meteorologist can use a rain gauge to get numerical data</u>	
Conditions for getting a rainbow		
1. <u>you are lucky</u>	2. <u>Sun and rain</u>	
Uses of a forecast		
1. <u>be prepared so we know what to wear</u>	2. <u>getting informed ahead of time can help</u>	3. <u>there is a wide variety of weather</u>

(Students' artifact, Worksheet No 3)

Finally, students worked on a post reading activity in which they had to answer three questions based on the information presented. Post reading activities were relevant in terms of comprehension, production and confidence, because they were the only possibility students had to show how much they learned and comprehended. In short, every single worksheet was designed with the purpose of developing vocabulary knowledge to enhance the learners' reading comprehension. In addition, the activities implemented created a link between developing understanding and confidence in students. The following example demonstrates that the learners felt self-assured in the post reading activities and that they understood the texts:

<p>Student # 1. Ramiro</p> <p>Analysis:</p> <p>In this activity, Ramiro was a very confident student, even though he had the chance to do it in Spanish, he decided to do it in English. Despite he committed grammar, spelling and punctuation mistakes, it was possible to understand what he tried to communicate. It means that he was focusing on meaning rather than form.</p>	 <p>(Students' artifact, Worksheet No 3)</p>
<p>Student # 2. Jolman</p> <p>Analysis:</p> <p>Jolman gave shorter answers; however, they are clear enough to respond properly to the questions. His tendency was to build better sentences in terms of structure to show his comprehension and confidence about the text. He focused a little bit more on structure.</p>	 <p>(Students' artifact, Worksheet No 3)</p>
<p>Student # 3. Jessica</p> <p>Analysis:</p> <p>Even though Jessica did not decide to make her production in English due to lack of confidence, she transmitted her understanding about the reading in her mother tongue trying to give very detailed answers to complete the activity.</p>	 <p>(Students' artifact, Worksheet No 3)</p>

In this activity, the learners were enquired about the importance of the weather forecast in their context. They were asked to do it in English; however, if they considered they had limitations writing in English, they could do it in Spanish. As they were building their confidence, some students decided to answer in Spanish, but some others did their best to express their opinions in English. Both situations show the different paces in which students developed their confidence, which could be influenced by their personal choices, self- image and previous experiences. It is vital to highlight that those students who answered in English focused on meaning instead of form, this means that grammar and structure issues were not relevant for them.

Building understanding and confidence also implies motivating students to learn more and develop other skills. As students increase their understanding, they get confident about learning and in turn they can ascertain both their strengths and their weaknesses. Moreover, when students are motivated, they use their positive experiences as the basis to learn issues they considered difficult or impossible to do before. Overall, building understanding and confidence are excellent triggers for the L2 learning process as exemplified with the next excerpt:

Student # 1: “It was hard at the beginning but then the teacher made me understand”. (*Open questions worksheet, No 1*) [sic]

This answer taken from the self-assessment shows that, at the beginning of the implementation, the student felt unsecure due to the complexity of the activities; however, he admitted that after some time and with a little help, it was possible for him to build the confidence he needed to understand. The following observations done during the intervention also support the importance of linking understanding and confidence:

The true or false activity proposed as a post reading activity, was very important for students to be aware of sentences meaning, students understood it was necessary first to analyze before choosing, students were working in groups and discussing the reasons why they chose every option. [sic]

(Field notes, Worksheet No 5)

These notes show the importance given to understanding meaning as the students were asked to analyze and support their answers. Group discussions about meaning also gave students confidence to continue working on the activities. Finally, students reflected on their process talking once more about their first feelings; and then, about the relevance of understanding vocabulary and increasing comprehension to develop the subsequent worksheets. Take, for example, the following excerpts.

Student # 1. At the beginning it was very difficult for us, I didn't know several words, but as we were working on the worksheets we were understanding better the vocabulary to understand other activities. [sic]

(Focus group, No 1)

Student # 2. When the worksheets started passing by, we felt we were increasing our comprehension, we consider we can make relations among words easily. [sic]

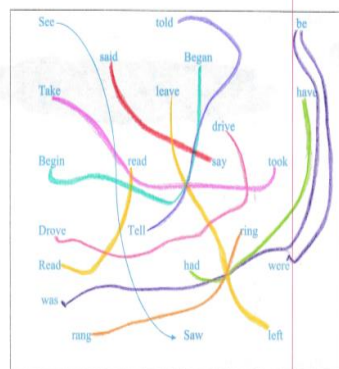
(Focus group, No 2)

The information presented in this subcategory shows the pertinence of designing teacher-made materials based on building understanding and confidence. Similarly, it reveals that relying on their classmates aided the learners to understand the language better and reduce their fears of making mistakes, thereby strengthening their self-confidence. The following subcategory shows how teaching resources contributes to developing brain's potential.

Developing brain's potential via teaching resources in the materials. Along the pedagogical intervention, teaching resources like spaghetti puzzles, unscramble activities and tic-tac-toes based on vocabulary learning strategies, were implemented for introducing new vocabulary. These activities were motivating for the students and gave them the possibility both

to work autonomously and to develop their brains' potential. Tomlinson (2010) used the concept of brain's potential in his multidimensional approach, which consists in providing students the chance to produce and process an L2 by using mental resources such as positive attitudes, imagination, and natural associations. Accordingly, while the students were classifying information, finding patterns and making connections among words, they stored vocabulary in their memories for a longer time as can be appreciated in the subsequent instances:

Student # 1: Spaghetti puzzle

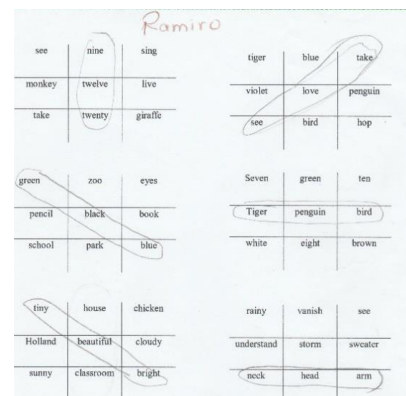


Couples

See - saw ✓	leave - left ✓
Take - Took ✓	said - said ✓
Begin - Began ✓	ring - rang ✓
Drive - Drove ✓	have - had ✓
Tell - Told ✓	Be - Was - were ✓
Read - read ✓	

(Students' artifact, Worksheet No 2)

Student # 2: Tic-tac-toe



Ramiro

Colors	Numbers	Animals	Places	Body parts
blue	twenty	bird	classroom	eyes
violet	nine	penguin	park	neck
black	twenty	tiger	zoo	head
green	seven	chicken	school	arm

(Students' artifact, Worksheet No 5)

In these activities, students were encouraged to use at least two of the mental resources proposed in each activity. Student # 1 resorted to her inner voice to make couples of verbs by finding patterns and establishing connections in the spaghetti puzzle. Student # 2 could categorize and classify a set of words into semantical fields by playing tic-tac-toe. To do so, he had to use his mental imagery and inner voice; first, to imagine the similarities and differences among words; and second, to classify each word properly.

In addition, in both activities, students were emotionally connected to the activities, as shown in the following excerpts:

Student # 1: “Looking for verbs in the spaghetti puzzle was a nice activity associated to vocabulary, students had the opportunity to explore the verbs in past by matching similarities among words”. [sic]

(Field notes, Worksheet No 2)

Student # 2: “Playing tic/tac/toe was motivating for them, they could organize expressions from the reading according to the categories they established by observing the words they had, so they interpreted and made excellent relationships, in short, they are having a really good time with this activity”. [sic]

(Field notes, Worksheet No 5)

Besides, students mentioned that one of these activities was enjoyable and meaningful as it allowed them to make use of their previous knowledge, as it is displayed in the next excerpt.

Student # 1: “Playing tic-tac-toe was a nice activity, it was hard at the beginning, but we realized it was based on previous vocabulary and we just reviewed it. It was a nice activity even when it has no drawings”. [sic]

(Focus group, No 1).

This example demonstrates that once students identified the purpose of the activities, they enjoyed working on them despite they were not visually appealing.

After this analysis, it is possible to affirm that developing materials as a vehicle to promote effective processes for learning vocabulary and reading comprehension is an essential aspect to consider when planning the EFL classes. In addition to developing language knowledge, materials contribute to building the students’ confidence and understanding. What is more, materials increase the brains’ potential by encouraging the learners to work on brain games. In the next category, I will present other sources that students use to support their vocabulary learning.

L1 as a source to support vocabulary learning. During the implementation of the materials, the use of the L1 was extremely necessary for students to understand how the English language works. This was evident when students tried to understand vocabulary in English as they translated, asked questions, and negotiated meaning with their classmates by using their L1. More precisely, in Nunan's (2001) words "a learner's first language (L1) has an important influence on the acquisition of a second (L2)" (p. 87). In view of that, it is a challenging task to avoid the use of L1 in an EFL classroom, especially if it is a group of beginners whose only linguistic reference is their mother tongue. This category reveals that students resorted to their L1 to assist their vocabulary learning since this was their main linguistic background.

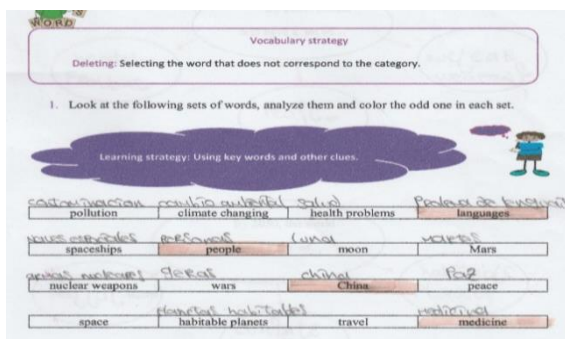
Heavy reliance on Spanish to figure out how new language works. At the beginning of the intervention, students believed that the words in English and Spanish followed the same rules and had similar meanings; that is why, it was difficult for them to understand phrasal verbs and chunks of words. At this point, it was noticeable that sometimes the rules of L1 and L2 were in conflict, leading the learners to make language mistakes. This is related to the concept of positive and negative interference between L1 and L2 (Nunan, 2001). On the one hand, positive interference refers to the possibility to transfer successfully rules and structures from L1 to L2 due to their similarities. On the other hand, the negative interference deals with the adverse effects of using rules and structures from L1 to L2. Consequently, it was necessary to explain the students that instead of trying to understand the texts by using a word by word system, they should see the language as a system that is full of expressions and word relationships.

Thanks to the worksheets developed in class, the students began to interpret the reading texts in a better way; they put aside their conception of isolated vocabulary and gradually developed the ability to look for familiar words. The use of Spanish was also essential for students when answering open questions in English, they tried to build expressions by using the

same structures as in their L1. This had a positive influence on the learners' process because they started to understand the use of high frequency words and expressions, they were more conscious of following adequate structures and they were able to identify in which cases there were missing words, which demonstrates that the students were reflecting on the English language use.

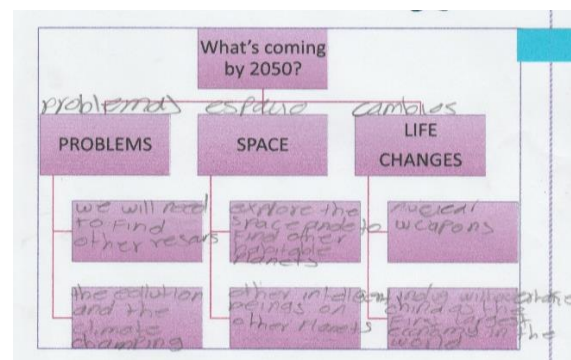
In the following samples of the students' artifacts, it can be observed that the learners depended on translation to follow instructions and remembering vocabulary. They decided to take some notes on the issues they considered the most important when developing the activities:

Student # 1: Presenting vocabulary



(Students' artifact, Worksheet No 4)

Student # 2: Mapping out



(Students' artifact, Worksheet No 4)

Student # 1 used translation for developing the activity related to deleting the odd word; however, one of her advantages is that she did not translate all the words literally due to the previous knowledge of the context. Student # 2, labeled the categories to make sure of what she had to look for in the text after reading.

Furthermore, some of the observations made in class confirm the impact of students' negative interference of their L1:

Student # 1: "It was kind of hard for them trying to understand some expressions and phrasal verbs such as have lunch and get up, because they expected them to be as they are in their Spanish literal translation". [sic]

Student # 1: “Chunking was a hard activity basically because students had to interpret expressions, the problem was that they used to work on isolated words, so making chunks and making sense of them was a big deal for them”. [sic]

(Field notes, Worksheet No 1)

In both cases, negative interference is linked to literal translation and the students’ difficulty to understand that certain structures are different from their L1. As a result, it was necessary to start working on the explanation of some features of the L2. The following instances taken from the focus group interviews illustrate some of the students’ impressions concerning the use of the L1:

Student # 1: “At the beginning I tried to copy from my classmates, but gradually I started to understand what the teacher was saying and explain, and also the instructions. Then I decided to do the translation of the words and of the sentences into Spanish to understand a little better”. [sic]

Student # 2: “I think that we learned vocabulary because now it is easier for us to understand a text. Now we do not have to look up for too many words in the dictionary to know what the word is, now we understand better a text when we read it”. [sic]

(Focus group, No 1)

According to the students, the best tool to understand the texts in English was translating the words into their L1. In addition, they mentioned that at the beginning of the intervention their understanding was not good enough; hence, they had to rely on their L1 most of the time to be able to solve the activities, but then it was easier for them to understand the texts because they expanded their vocabulary. This subcategory is strongly related to the following one, which covers the importance of students’ L1 as background to learn an L2.

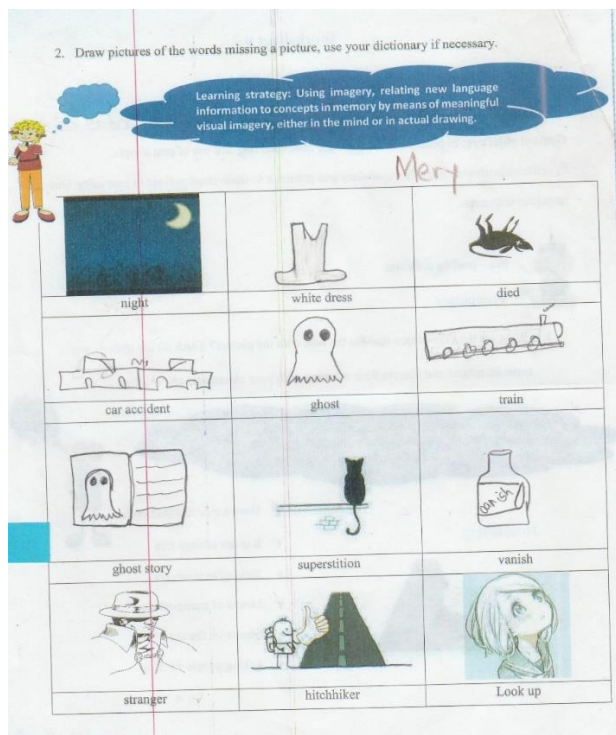
Previous knowledge of words in English used in Spanish to figure out words. It is well-known that one’s previous knowledge is necessary to make connections among the words, concepts and meanings. According to Van Lier (2001), that previous knowledge can also refer to

the similarity of certain words with the L1 or the context in which an individual learned those words. Therefore, the previous knowledge can cause misconceptions about the L2.

When reading, students first looked for familiar words to make in their minds a general idea of the text; in this process, they looked for similarities between L1 and L2. However, it was noticeable that students needed a guidance to confirm or reject their first ideas and, in this way, avoid misconceptions. According to Van Lier (2001), this guidance helped the learners to raise their “conscious awareness about features of the target language” (p. 161). As a result, after working explicitly on vocabulary, the students were able to identify which lexical connections were appropriate according to the context. Besides, they began to be more conscious about the language use and the structures in the L2. As an example, I this image was selected:

Student # 1

Presenting vocabulary: Drawing pictures



(Students' artifact, Worksheet No 2)

As it can be seen in this sample, the learners were asked to make a drawing of the missing vocabulary pictures. One of the words was **vanish** and the student drew a bottle of vanish. In our context, that cleaning product is utilized to make clothes wither. This exemplifies that the context in which a word is learned plays a vital role in the meaning that an individual assigns to it. This instance also confirms that the previous knowledge is essential for figuring out the meaning of the words when learning an L2. It is important to mention that the real meaning of this word was explained not only to avoid misconceptions, but also to aid the learners to become aware of this type of aspects. The following field notes support the previous statements:

Student # 1: “Students got surprised when they were asked about the meaning of the verb “vanish”, they associated it with “el vanish de la ropa” so it was nice to explain to them why this product is called vanish, because of its effects when doing the laundry. This explanation made students remember this new word better”. [sic]

Student # 2: “A couple of students were talking about the characters in the story, when they identified the word lady they supposed that the story was about a girl called lady and they just made up something like: lady se murió. My inference about it was that students needed to be guided during the reading to help them find the sense of the stories. [sic]

(Field notes, Worksheet No 2)

These examples demonstrate that it is paramount to clarify students the meaning of these confusing words to avoid misconceptions about the L2. The first one was related to vocabulary context and its effect on memory storage, and the second one is about the misconceptions that students have and need to be eliminated to guarantee comprehension. Finally, it is pertinent to display some examples on the learners’ points of view in regard to these misconceptions and the value they gave to the teacher’s explanations:

Student # 1: I asked a friend about the meaning of the word sunny, and she told me that it was the same that tsunami, then when the teacher corrected the activity I realized my friend was wrong and I decided not to copy from others' works anymore. [sic]

Student # 2: I thought that vanish was that thing for doing the laundry, but after the teachers' explanation we understood why it is called that way. [sic]

(Focus group, No 2)

In general, reliance on the L1 might be a convenient tool for supporting L2 vocabulary learning. In this case, Spanish shares some structural similarities with the English language, allowing students to get familiar with high frequency words and basic sentence structures. This reliance on the L1 may also stimulate autonomous work and lead students to use their dictionaries to understand instructions and texts. Furthermore, it is important to consider that the L1 represents the students' previous knowledge and their main linguistic background; thus, they may use it to facilitate their language learning. Lastly, it is necessary to highlight that one of the teacher's roles in an L2 class is to help the learners to end up the misconceptions they have built about the L2.

Factors and strategies impacting reading comprehension. As it was previously stated, this study aims at improving the seventh graders' reading comprehension. It was ascertained that one of the factors that influenced reading comprehension was language knowledge. According to Alderson (1984), L2 reading comprehension strongly depends on the stage of L2 development, and only after having a language knowledge threshold, it is possible to start transferring the students' reading abilities from L1 to L2. This underlines the necessity of developing a general language competence so that students have a set of linguistic tools that permits them to begin their reading comprehension process.

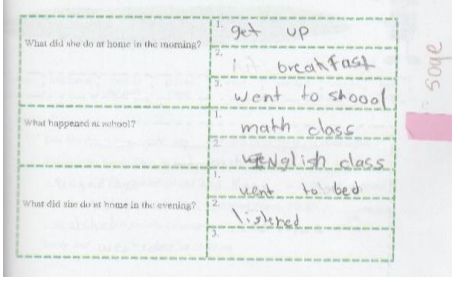
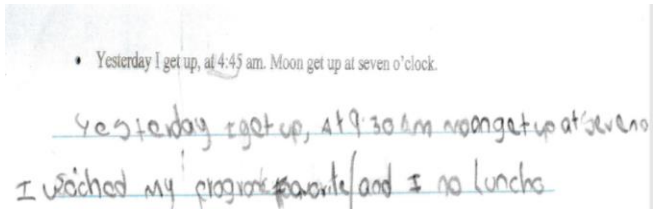
By the same token, sharing knowledge was the best strategy for strengthening the learners' language acquaintance in terms of vocabulary, structure, meaning understanding, and

reading comprehension. Tsui (2001) described sharing knowledge as the opportunities students have for negotiating meaning; in consequence, classroom peers' interaction is highly recommended for developing language processes like reading comprehension.

This category regarding reading comprehension is composed of the following subcategories: (a) *Language knowledge as a determinant factor for reading comprehension*, and (b) *Contributions of sharing and comparing knowledge to reading comprehension*.

Language knowledge as a determinant factor for reading comprehension. According to the observations made in class, the students began to develop their reading comprehension in L2 by using literal translation. When translating, students found that L1 and L2 have both similarities and differences that caused certain misunderstandings and reading problems. Yorio (1971) stated that lack of similarities between L1 and L2 are the first causes of difficulties for reading comprehension. This means that students expect that any foreign language works in the same way as their L1. Based on Devine (1988) insights, this is a clear interference of the L1, as well as it demonstrates a problem related to the language competence.

Translating keeps students in a state in which they just try to understand the meaning of isolated words, which prevents them from understanding language chunks and developing reading comprehension. In addition, translation does not permit the learners to see how the meaning of the words are related to the context of the text. This can be observed in the following samples from the students' artifacts:

<p style="text-align: center;">Student # 1: Mapping out</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">(Artifacts, Worksheet No 1)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Student # 2: Post reading activity –</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Comparing daily activities</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">(Artifacts, Worksheet No 1)</p>
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Student # 1 was trying to map out information he read from a text. For him, it was difficult to understand how expressions work in the L2; for example, he wrote “breakfast” instead of “have/has breakfast”, as well as he wrote the word as it sounds in his L1. In the case of “English class”, the verb was missing, and he made a common spelling mistake due to the interference of his mother tongue when using the vowel “I” instead of “E”. Even though this was not a reading problem itself, that interference might cause certain difficulties when writing or completing a post reading activity; besides, it shows a difficulty to recognize chunks of language. Concerning Student # 2, the first interference is related to word order; he wrote the sentence as in his L1: first the subject then the adjective. He finished the sentence trying to express he did not have lunch, but in the word order, he followed the Spanish way to make a sentence.

In the following excerpts from class observations, it is possible to observe some difficulties with regard to understanding language chunks, finding key words and working with high frequency vocabulary. These aspects related to language knowledge had a negative impact on students’ reading comprehension in terms of time management, understanding and motivation:

They decided to work in pairs even though that was not the instruction. Facing phrasal verbs for reading was hard for them, they found it difficult to understand that two words mean just one thing, they continue making relationships between L2 and their mother tongue. [sic]

(Field notes, Worksheet No 2)

When doing the activity, they found they have to read long sentences to do the matching definition, once more it was evident they felt discouraged when facing big pieces of information. I had to talk to them about the need to find key words in the sentences to find general meaning, it was no necessary to understand everything in Spanish for making sense of the sentences. It is hard for them trying not to look up for high frequency words. Some of them had a hard time trying to complete the activity properly. [sic]

(Field notes, Worksheet No 4)

After working on the factors that affected reading comprehension, students were conscious of the fact that their knowledge about vocabulary would be evaluated by means of their understanding of the reading passages, as shown in the next example:

Student # 1: Our understanding was evaluated in the readings, so we knew that by facing the text we were checking our learning. [sic]

(Focus group, No 2)

Despite all the factors that affected the seventh graders' reading comprehension, it is worth highlighting that students were able to overcome those difficulties and they decided to share their language knowledge to improve this skill, as it is described in the next subcategory.

Contributions of sharing and comparing knowledge to reading comprehension.

Throughout the intervention, the learners had the possibility to share and compare their knowledge with their peers. This experience allowed students to reflect on their knowledge and language use as they explained to each other word meanings, chunks of words and language structures. Moreover, the learners gave each other arguments to support their answers. Tsui (2001) argued that when students carry out these actions autonomously, they are looking for negotiation of meaning. In this case, students constantly needed to ask for clarification of the meanings and instructions, repetition of sounds and definitions, or confirmation of their guesses or interpretations.

Sharing and comparing knowledge are highly associated to the social/affective learning strategies proposed by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) who stress the importance of the teacher's or peers' help. Thus, providing students with the possibility to share their knowledge was not only a relevant learning experience for them, but also a suitable strategy that permitted the students to learn from others and improve their reading comprehension.

Despite the use of this strategy was not planned during the design of the worksheets, it was necessary to include it along the pedagogical intervention because the students needed additional support to develop the activities proposed. An excerpt taken from the open questions of a worksheet demonstrates the need to let students share their acquaintance with their classmates:

It is important to have more time to share our ideas in class. [sic]

(Open questions, worksheet No 3)

As stated above, the students' reading comprehension was improved after allowing the students to share and discuss their interpretations of the texts with their peers, as can be appreciated in the subsequent notes:

At the beginning of the class, students started organizing by themselves they work groups. They were discussing about the relationship among the weather, the clothes and the boots; they said that they were not related basically because they do not think any of them wore boots. The important thing about the comment was that they tried to use evidences from their real lives to justify their choices. [sic]

(Field notes, Worksheet No 3)

The social/affective learning strategies were also an outstanding opportunity to keep students asking for clarification, thereby learning from others. Those experiences aided the learners to develop autonomy and improve their reading comprehension, as displayed in the following notes:

Student # 1: We could be our guides, we did not need the dictionary neither the teacher. [sic]

(Focus group, No 1)

Student # 2: If the worksheet had been implemented in an individual way, it would have been so hard. We consider important what the others know, and we learn from them, copying is different from sharing ideas. [sic]

(Focus group, No 2)

Student # 3: Our classmates were important because we helped each other to develop the activities, it was nice and better making groups. [sic]

(Focus group, No 3)

These categories and subcategories can be summarized as follows: In terms of MD, it is essential to mention that materials need to boost aspects such as understanding and confidence. Regarding vocabulary, the students' L1 must be considered as a fundamental tool that facilitates the foreign language learning as it is the only linguistic background students have. Finally, with respect to reading comprehension, it is necessary to consider the students' language knowledge before implementing any reading strategy. Besides, it is important to highlight the suitability of letting the students work in groups, so they can share their knowledge and learn from each other.

The following chapter comprises the conclusions, pedagogical implications, and limitations of this study, as well as it suggests some questions for further research

Chapter V

Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

This chapter embraces the conclusions and pedagogical implications on the basis of the research question set at the beginning of this study: How do the design and implementation of worksheets based on vocabulary learning strategies contribute to seventh graders' reading comprehension in a public school?

It also comprises the pedagogical implications for the ELT community, the participants of this study and the school where the pedagogical intervention took place. Besides, it explores the contributions of the study for me as a teacher, researcher and materials developer. Finally, it describes the limitations along the research process and presents the suggested questions for future research.

Conclusions

One of the most common difficulties when learning a foreign language is the lack of vocabulary, which constitutes a big portion of any language and it is a determinant factor to develop comprehension. Bearing this in mind, and in light of the research question previously stated, this study was focused on the improvement of the seventh graders' reading comprehension through the implementation materials of vocabulary strategies.

The findings revealed that the materials implemented had a positive impact on the students not only in terms of reading comprehension and language learning, but also as valuable resources that increased the learners' confidence and developed their brains' potential. Activities like brain games allowed students to be emotionally engaged to the activities, to use mental imagination for solving the puzzles, and to hear their inner voices while processing language (Tomlinson, 2011). In this regard, Núñez and Téllez (2009) declared that materials development "should not turn into a meaningless task with the sole purpose of enjoying and keeping the

students busy” (p. 173). Therefore, the resources implemented in class should not be confused on games to entertain students; on the contrary, they must include activities that foster the students’ language learning and develop an emotional connection.

This category is closely related to one of Tomlinson’s (1988) SLA principles in which he highlights the importance of helping learners to develop their self-confidence. Group work discussions and teacher’s guidance are some examples on how teachers can promote motivation and, at the same time, build up confidence. In addition, materials development was an excellent option to have resources for everyone in the classroom, as Lopera (2015) argued “teacher-produced materials are a good option for educational settings as they benefit both the institutions and students” (p. 131). Besides, teacher - made materials are usually more complete than textbooks because they can be adapted to the population and bring benefits for all the community.

Regarding the second category, it was observed that the students relied on Spanish to figure out how the L2 worked. This process allowed students to develop the ability of looking for familiar words to draw their own conclusions about meanings, instead of trying to understand the meaning of each word separately. Students resorted to positive interference of the L1 to compare and understand rules and structures (Nunan, 2001). The use of Spanish was also essential for students when answering open questions in English since they tried to build expressions by using the same structures as in their L1. This strategy worked for the learners because they began to understand the use of high frequency words and expressions, as well as they became more conscious of the structures they needed to follow when writing their answers.

The last findings are related to the strategies that students used to improve their reading comprehension. In this way, sharing knowledge was the most suitable option for strengthening students’ language knowledge in terms of vocabulary, structure, meaning understanding, and reading comprehension. According to Tsui (2001), sharing knowledge offers learners the

opportunity to negotiate meaning; thus, group and peer interaction is strongly recommended for developing language processes like reading comprehension.

Sharing and comparing knowledge are highly associated to the social/affective learning strategies proposed by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) since they stressed the importance of questioning for getting clarification, and the teacher's or peers' help. Thus, providing the students with the possibility to share and compare their knowledge not only was a relevant learning experience for them, but also contributed to the improvement of their reading comprehension.

Summing up, this pedagogical intervention had a positive impact on the improvement of seventh graders' reading comprehension. It was demonstrated that contextualized materials give the teacher and the students the possibility to explore different practices, provides students with opportunities to share their knowledge, and promotes language learning. Additionally, students understood the importance of sharing their knowledge to improve their comprehension.

Pedagogical Implications

The impact of this study must be considered from three different perspectives: as a materials developer, as a teacher researcher, and as a teacher. As a materials-developer, I understood the relevance of considering the students' needs, interests and context. Besides, I realized that every decision when designing materials has a direct impact on the students' learning process and their behavior in class.

As a teacher researcher, I learned the importance of conducting research studies in the classroom as they change the teaching practices and the way we conceive learning. This study made me consider that "Colombian teachers implement many things in their classrooms without realizing the impact of those implementations in the theoretical and practical field" (Rico, 2005, p. 96). This means that we, as teachers, are always trying to innovate and improve our practices; however, we do not give ourselves the opportunity to reflect on our every day practice, thereby

missing the great opportunity to become teacher-researchers. Finally, as a teacher, I realized the importance of listening to the students. This allowed me to know them better, and to understand how they see a foreign language and why they make certain mistakes.

In the same line of thought, this group of seventh graders had the opportunity to explore different resources, activities, and learning strategies, which had a positive impact not only on their reading comprehension, but also on their perception about learning a foreign language. Lastly, this research study provided improvement opportunities for the teacher-researcher, the students and, in general, for the EFL community.

Limitations

Regarding MD, one of the limitations was the cost of the materials due to the quantity of students who participated in this study. This is a high expense for both the teachers and the students; especially considering that this intervention entailed the implementation of five worksheets. It would be necessary to count on additional funds from school or parents to develop research studies like this. In addition, the social and economic characteristics of this group of students do not allow them the possibility to pay every class for these materials.

Lack of resources at this school are also a limitation, technology and adequate dictionaries for all students were necessary to carry out the activities; as a result, delays in the learning process and implementation were visible. It was not possible to play the audios on time, or even include some videos in the implementation due to the uncertainty of having the required equipment.

The huge quantity of students and the short time given for the English classes in this school are also a constraint, there are not time to provide students with enough language input, extra activities or explanations they need. It implies a deficient familiarity with the second

language at school. In addition, this problematic situation causes also that completion of worksheets turns into a requirement which granted them with another class grade.

Changing teachers' requirements at school due to the close of a branch, implies a restriction in the continuity of the learning process in the group of students selected for this implementation, as well as the continuity of this research study.

Further Research

Considering the currently research study and its findings, I suggest the following questions: What reading strategies can be developed in true beginners? What aspects different from vocabulary have an impact on reading comprehension? How to reduce the impact of L1 in L2 learning? What would be the characteristics of a curriculum to promote reading comprehension in public elementary schools? How do the design and implementation of graded materials based on the communicative approach impact the language level of a group of students from elementary school?

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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Form



ALCALDÍA MAYOR
DE BOGOTÁ D.C.
SECRETARÍA DE EDUCACIÓN

COLEGIO GERMÁN ARCINIEGAS I.E.D.
"TRASCENDENCIA SOCIAL CON CALIDAD HUMANA HACIA LA EXCELENCIA"
 RESOLUCIÓN DE APROBACIÓN S.E.D. N° 07 - 0833 del 16 de Mayo de 2014
 (Aclarada por las resoluciones 07 - 0837 de 29/05/14 y 07 - 0868 de 15/09/14)
 PREESCOLAR, BÁSICA Y MEDIA ACADÉMICO
 CÓDIGO DANE 111001107832



125-REC/17
 Bogotá D.C., 22 de Agosto de 2017
 Estimados Padres y Madres de Familia:


Reciban un cordial saludo. Me permito informarles que la docente Catherin Viviana González Acosta como parte de su formación académica y personal, se encuentra realizando estudios de postgrado en la Universidad Externado de Colombia, en la Maestría de educación, línea de investigación de Didáctica del inglés. Para la satisfactoria finalización de este proceso, es un requisito adelantar un proyecto de investigación en el aula de clase. Esta investigación busca realizar el análisis de la implementación de guías basadas en estrategias de aprendizaje de vocabulario para mejorar los niveles de comprensión lectora en los estudiantes de grado séptimo de esta institución; sede B, jornada tarde. El estudio será realizado en el curso 703 durante este semestre en los espacios de clase ya establecidos dentro del horario de los estudiantes.

Dentro de las actividades a realizar con los estudiantes, se encuentra la recolección de datos por medio de instrumentos como: notas de campo, en las que la docente investigadora registrará el desarrollo de las sesiones durante la implementación de las guías; las guías diseñadas por la docente y desarrolladas por los estudiantes, y las entrevistas a grupos focales. Los datos obtenidos serán presentados con fines pedagógicos.

Teniendo en cuenta los principios éticos que deben guiar estas investigaciones en las aulas, las identidades de los participantes permanecerán anónimas en cualquier tipo de análisis de resultados que se genere al finalizar este estudio de investigación (documento de tesis y artículo académico). Adicionalmente, la investigadora será la única persona con acceso a los datos. Los estudiantes participarán de forma voluntaria en el estudio y podrán retirarse de él en el momento que lo deseen. Sin embargo, es importante mencionar que las sesiones se realizarán como clases de la asignatura de inglés y que el estudiante debe asistir normalmente debido a que hacen parte fundamental del currículo.

Por favor diligencie la sección de abajo con el fin de autorizar la participación de su hijo en este estudio. Muchas gracias por su tiempo y acostumbrada colaboración.

Cordialmente,



SORANGELA MIRANDA BELTRÁN
RECTORA

AUTORIZACION

Yo _____ acudiente del estudiante _____
 del curso _____ jornada _____ de la Sede _____, autorizo que mi hijo (a) participe
 en el proyecto de la Maestría de educación, línea de investigación de Didáctica del inglés que adelanta la docente investigadora Licenciada
 CATHERIN VIVIANA GONZÁLEZ ACOSTA. Firma: _____ N° de Identificación: _____
 Teléfonos de Contacto: _____

Appendix B: Students' artifacts

Worksheet # 3

What's the weather like?

Name: _____ Date: _____

General objective: to promote in students the understanding and use of forecasts.

Specific objective: to make students identify and practice vocabulary to talk about the weather.

Pre-reading activities

Vocabulary

Vocabulary strategy

Deleting: Selecting the word that does not correspond to the category.

1. Read the following information, then decide which of the following words are related to the topic by **circling** them.

Learning strategy: classifying what is read into meaningful groups.

The weather forecast tells us what the temperature and air conditions are likely to be outside in the near future.

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Weather	rainy	boots	jacket	windy
Cloudy	Sunny	cool	Warm	
Storm	safety	temperature	hurricane	
sunshine	tools	Rainbow	sun	time
hot	rain	sky	wind	clouds

Vocabulary strategy

Completing: for completing sentences, it is necessary to keep in mind aspects related to context, grammar, vocabulary and comprehension, to locate the corresponding word accordingly.

2. Change the following images for the previous words to make sense of these sentences.

Learning strategy: placing new words into context.

a) Today is a _____ day!

b) Next Thursday will be _____.

c) Weather conditions will be severe, there will be a _____.

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d) It can be, _____ or windy.

e) If you are lucky, you may be able to see a _____.

f) You must be prepared in case of a _____.

How do you think **deleting** and **completing** strategies worked for you? Share your insights with a partner and then your teacher?

Vocabulary strategy

Matching: The matching activities are focused on finding a corresponding, suitably associated, or harmonious

3. Unscramble the following words, then match them to the corresponding picture.

Learning strategy: using Imagery. Relating new language information to concepts in memory.

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Unscramble	Word	Picture
drin	_____	
ook	_____	
ain	_____	
toh	_____	
chsou	_____	
wtima	_____	

Vocabulary strategy

Identifying Chunks: A lexical chunk is a group of words that are commonly found together. Lexical chunks include collocations but these usually just involve content words, not grammar.

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4. Complete the following expressions looking at the examples and using the expressions in the chart.

Learning strategy: recognizing and using formulas and patterns.

Listening to	My house – the school	air	Numerical data	sunny	teachers
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Temperature conditions.	_____ conditions
It can be rainy.	It can be _____
Watching the weather forecasts.	_____ the weather forecasts.
Getting information	Getting _____.
From one place to another.	From _____ to _____.
Weather forecasts are not always right.	_____ are not always right.

How do you think **matching** and **identifying chunks** strategies worked for you? Share your insights with a partner and then your teacher?

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Listening activity

5. Listen carefully and match the two parts of the sentences:

Learning strategy: using key words. Remembering new word by using auditory and visual links.

dry and cloudy	windy	cloudy and sunny	rainy
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a) The weather in the north is mostly

b) The weather in the east is mostly

c) The weather in the west is mostly

d) The weather in the south is mostly

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Adapted from: <https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/skills/listening-skills-practice/weather-forecast>



While – reading activities:

Reading activity

6. Read the following text and then complete the document:

Learning strategy: Making associations, relating new language information to concepts already in memory.



What's the forecast?

The weather forecast tells us what the temperature and air conditions are likely to be outside in the near future. There is a wide variety of weather, from sunny to stormy and warm to cool. It can be rainy or cloudy or windy. Listening to or watching the weather forecast can help us be prepared so we know what to wear. If weather conditions will be severe, like snow, a storm or a hurricane, getting information ahead of time can help us prepare so we can stay safe. A meteorologist is a person whose job it is to forecast the weather. There are many tools available now that help the meteorologist do his/her job. A common tool for getting an accurate measurement of the temperature is a thermometer. A high temperature probably means plenty of sunshine for everyone. When the weather is rainy, a meteorologist can use a rain gauge to get numerical data about how much rain is falling outdoors. If you are lucky, you may be able to see a rainbow if the sun comes out while the last of the rain is still sprinkling from the sky. Wind brings us weather

because it blows clouds from one place to another. Therefore, it is helpful to know from which direction the wind is blowing. A wind vane can provide this information, so meteorologists know what is coming. Weather forecasts are not always right, but they get more accurate all the time.

Adapted from: http://www.k12reader.com/reading-comprehension/GR6/What's_The_Forecast.pdf


Reading strategy

Completing a document: use the content of the text to fill a form or a table which organizes the information.

Varieties of the weather		
1.	2.	3.
Severe conditions		
1.	2.	3.
Meteorologist tools		
1.	2.	
Conditions for getting a rainbow		
1.	2.	
Uses of a forecast		
1.	2.	3.

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Post - reading activities



- Why is it important to check the weather?


- How do people get the weather forecast in your country?

- In what situations can you check the weather forecast?

Writing activity

7. Complete the following table relating nouns and weather adjectives. Give some examples.

Learning strategy: Repeating, saying or doing something over and over.




Noun	Adjective	Examples
Rain	rainy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I love the rain. Rainy days are sad.

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	windy	
Sun		
	cloudy	
Storm		

Speaking activity




8. Make some predictions about the weather for tomorrow in our country, use the following words and expressions, and share your predictions to your classmates:

Learning strategy: Making associations, relating new language information to concepts already in memory.



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sunny in the north	hurricane in the south	rainy in the east	rainbow in the west	windy in the center
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- It will be sunny in the north tomorrow.
- There will be a _____ next Saturday.
- It won't be _____ tomorrow.
- People will see a _____.
- It will be _____ tomorrow.

Self - assessment

Cross out the chart that describes your impressions about each assessment criteria.
Auto-evaluación: Marca la casilla que describa tus impresiones al respecto de cada criterio de evaluación.

My worksheet/Mi guía...	It does...	It can be better...
Offers numerous vocabulary activities. Ofrece numerosas actividades de vocabulario.		
Has meaningful and appealing pictures. Tiene imágenes significativas y atractivas.		
Has leveled content. Su contenido es apropiado para mi nivel.		
The activities are properly sequenced for me to learn in a relaxed way. Las actividades están organizadas de manera apropiada para que yo aprenda en una forma tranquila.		

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Provides opportunities to share my ideas about the weather into my context.
Me da la oportunidad de compartir mis ideas sobre el clima en mi contexto.

Any other comment about the material?
¿Algún otro comentario sobre el material?

Learning vocabulary	I do	I can improve
Helps me to identify vocabulary related to the weather forecast. Me ayuda a identificar vocabulario relacionado el pronóstico del tiempo.		
I could remember and substitute vocabulary related to the weather. Puedo recordar y sustituir vocabulario relacionado con el clima.		
Let's me understand descriptions of the weather to be safe and think of making future decisions. Me permite entender descripciones del clima para estar a salvo y pensar en tomar decisiones a futuro.		

How was your vocabulary impacted through the work in this worksheet?
¿Cómo fue su vocabulario impactado por el trabajo con esta guía?

Reading comprehension	I do	I can improve
I can identify information related to the weather. Puedo identificar información relacionada con el clima.		
I can map the reading out by completing a chart with specific information. Puedo extraer la información principal de la lectura completando un cuadro con información específica.		
I can understand sequences to establish important facts and topics in a text. Puedo entender secuencias para establecer los hechos principales y los temas en un texto.		

How do you perceive your understanding of the information that you read now?
¿Cómo percibe su entendimiento de lo que lee ahora?

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Images taken from:

<https://encrypted-tbn0.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcS6bRnDYmepPtvGDsn9yjslk8g-Eu3P60-0h3czTXpYO4Hrk0DK>

[Business vector created by Macrovector - Freepik.com](http://www.freepik.com/free-photos-vectors/business)

https://st.depositphotos.com/1325352/3831/v/950/depositphotos_38317145-stock-illustration-colombia-colombia-map.jpg

Appendix C: Field Notes Form

DATE: <u>Monday, October 9th/2017</u>	SESSION: 2	TIME: 4:30 – 6:30 PM	WORKSHEET # 1
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ACTIVITY	OBSERVATIONS	COMMENTS

Active

DATE: <u>Monday, October 9th/2017</u>	SESSION: 2	TIME: 4:30 – 6:30 PM	WORKSHEET # 1
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ACTIVITY	OBSERVATIONS	COMMENTS

Active

Appendix D: Focus Group Interview**FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW****VOCABULARY**

¿Qué les pareció el trabajo con las estrategias de vocabulario incluidas en los talleres?

¿Alguna estrategia o estrategias de vocabulario que sienten realmente fueron o son útiles para el aprendizaje de vocabulario en inglés?

¿Qué pueden decir sobre su aprendizaje de vocabulario luego de desarrollar estas guías?

READING COMPREHENSION

¿Cómo les parecieron las actividades realizadas con las lecturas?

¿Cómo creen que cambio o no su comprensión de lectura de textos en inglés?

¿Cómo podría caracterizar su habilidad para afrontar textos en inglés como resultado de la implementación del material?

¿Cuál fue tu experiencia con estos talleres que desarrollamos en clase?

MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT

¿Cuáles fueron sus impresiones sobre los talleres? O ¿Cómo se sintieron al desarrollar las guías?

¿Cómo creen que estas guías contribuyeron o no a su proceso de aprendizaje?

¿Qué opinan en general sobre la implementación de este material en este grupo?